A Collection of Short Stories #1

by Jonathan Olvera

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A Collection of Short Stories #1

by

Jonathan Olvera

Phoenix, Arizona
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Table of Contents
Short Stories by Jonathan Olvera

1. **Valentine's Day** – pg 6
2. **The Destitution** – pg 7
3. **The Talking Red Bird** – pg 8
4. **The Price of Growth** – pg 10
5. **Lost in Translation, Found in Japan** – pg 12
6. **Super Bowl LIX** – pg 13
7. **Grandma’s Magic** – pg 15
8. **Axolotl** – pg 16
9. **The Cow and the Cucumber** – pg 17
10. **The Great Galactic Streak** – pg 20
11. **A Place Held Near** – pg 25
12. **I Hate Reading the Bible (Until I Didn't)** – pg 26
13. **Heaven’s Treasure Box** – pg 27
14. **From Struggle to Strength: Overcoming Obesity** – pg 28
15. **Bubbles: The Chimp Who Changed My Perspective** – pg 30
16. **The Spirit of Saint Nicholas in the Southwest** – pg 32
17. **The Night of Shadows and Sweets** – pg 34
18. **A Dog from the Stars: Woof! Woof!** – pg 35
19. **Guidance from the Heavens** – pg 36
20. **The Magic of Fall** – pg 37

21. **The Power of Habits** – pg 39

22. **President's Day!** – pg 40

23. **The Accidental Prophet** – pg 41

24. **The Well of Change** – pg 42

25. **The Divide: A Future of Order and Wilderness** – pg 44

26. **Whispers of Lycea: A Feline's Mission** – pg 47

27. **A Hilarious Fall: The Christmas Morning Mishap** – pg 49

28. **Rudolph’s Journey: A Test of Faith and Winter’s Promise** – pg 50

29. **The Life of a Laughing Clown** – pg 53

30. **Funny Story** – pg 54

31. **ZaZa Happening: The Night I Was Taken** – pg 55

32. **A Grandmother’s Strength: A Journey of Love and Healing** – pg 58

33. **Grandmother’s Recipes: A Taste of Love and Memories** – pg 60

34. **Santa’s Promise: A Winter of Blessings** – pg 61

35. **Good Night, My Child: A Journey into Dreams** – pg 63

36. **The Spark of Discovery: A Student of Benjamin Franklin and the School of Electricity** – pg 64

37. **A New State** – pg 68

38. **Coins on the Cobblestones** – pg 72

39. **The Thirteen Stars and the Miracle of Fire** – pg 75

40. **Xeiph Custin: Last of the Void** – pg 80

41. **Joseph Stalin** – pg 83

42. **Collateral Regret** – pg 90

43. **When Cats Fly and Dogs Snooze** – pg 97

44. **The Pet Store** – pg 100

45. **Liz** – pg 103

46. **Zippy Zany's Clown Catastrophe** – pg 111

47. **A Scary Story** – pg 112

48. **A Season of Praise** – pg 117

49. **A Season of Change** – pg 118

50. **Sunlight Over Stone: A Testament from the Worksite of God** – pg 119

51. **Desert Notes and Painted Dreams** – pg 123

52. **Tea, Music, and Dissonance: Life with Ludwig van Beethoven** – pg 125

53. **A Youth of Fire and Soil** – pg 128

54. **The Treasury of Fate: A Youth's Chronicle of Vision and Valor** – pg 131

55. **The Last Quiet Heart** – pg 133

56. **Living in Color** – pg 136

57. **Curtains in the Wind** – pg 139

58. **Summer of the New Empire** – pg 141

59. **Desolation Walk: A Journey of Survival and Hope** – pg 144

60. **Elantra the Hero: A Bark that Saved a Life** – pg 152

70. **Foundations in the Wilderness** – pg 154

Author's Preface

Dear Reader,

Before you lies a mosaic of moments—some imagined, others lived, all deeply felt. This collection of short stories represents more than just creative expression; it is a journey through the everyday and the extraordinary, the whimsical and the weighty, the sacred and the surreal.

In these pages, you'll find laughter and lament, questions and quiet revelations. *Valentine's Day* offers a glimpse of innocent love, while *The Price of Growth* explores transformation through pain. Stories like *Heaven's Treasure Box* dazzle with cosmic color, while *Zippy Zany's Clown Catastrophe* brings levity and absurdity. Together, they reflect the full spectrum of human experience.

Whether it was a chimp named Bubbles, a red bird with something to say, or a child dreaming beside *Santa's Promise*, each character emerged with a truth to share. Some tales confront belief, like *I Hate Reading the Bible (Until I Didn't)*. Others reimagine myth, memory, and modern life—from *Rudolph's Journey* to *Whispers of Lycea*. Through it all, the thread remains: to wonder, to wrestle, to grow.

Every story—no matter how brief or bizarre—is a glimmer of the divine, a flicker of insight. Even in the margins of comedy (*Funny Story*) or the surreal (*The Cow and the Cucumber*), something real waits to be found.

If you smiled, shed a tear, or saw yourself even for a flicker of a sentence, then these stories have done their work. My hope is that, like *The Thirteen Stars and the Miracle of Fire* or *Guidance from the Heavens*, these pages offer light—if only for a moment.

Thank you for turning the page. Thank you for seeing the wonder.

With deep gratitude,
Jonathan Olvera

Valentine's Day

By Jonathan Olvera

The wind streaks across the open Valley set between two mounds and a plane.
This plane was more than new or undiscovered. It is home to a healthy group of people.

The month is February and the Seasons are turning into a more gentle side of winter. What seemed like an eternal spell of cold temperatures was the beginning of a warmer and more gentle sphere.

It is usual this time of year.

I wouldn't have it any other way, myself I become tired of the summer season so hot! It seems to stretch an eternity in the range of humanity and our everyday lives.
February is welcome and the day of the cupid is soon to be upon us.

A gentle kiss of relief is Valentine's day.

It is good to be grateful today and thankful.

Thankful and Caring for a new Season, a better partner, a new venture, one's actual home.

The gifts above our head and below our feet are Grand and uncountable. I am glad for this Valentine's day.

Thank you!

The Destitution

By Jonathan Olvera

I was making a cottage with my mother amidst the tall Pines of Moscow. It was a time of fair season and change.

I did attend the local church services.

I was in prayer and contract.

I listened as a young man to preachers and Elders always minding the words of our sermons.

It was unfortunate the ordinance of our localities called for an assembly of men.
We assembled and came to a decision to make a good meal and prepare for a great work to be done in our home.

This was because it was a good home.

It is America.

Many days were spent gazing at the Waters and shores that provided many healthy seasons.

In time the sky would become a road.

The land would provide contract and exchange of our good faith into America.
Far away the call of service did attract our best people and we did work according to our good faith and meditation.

The scenery changed and the land seemed to be in abandon.

no one liked this place. It was harsh although I was determined to make it my home.

I picked a shovel up and I did dig for days until I saw a change for water.

For many days and nights I prayed for water and good finds in the place.

I found both and the Light breaking the sky after the great dragon of darkness was an amazing sight.

I will never forget this scene I have in the land I came to after my home.
In the new venture Desolation.

A Exile of the King and a Blessing of the Angels.

The Talking Red Bird

By Jonathan Olvera

"Squack!"
"Crow!"
"Ahhhhwck!"

This was a very noisy Parrot, it was red very large red bird with very many feathers.

It was known to very many people other than they were not too many like it.

This parrot was accustomed to traveling.

I became accustomed to entertainment.

"How are you today?"

Master would ask this parrot.

"Squack!"

"Very good!" the animal replies.

The man had traveled to find a source for a rare bird like this one.

It was not sure where the bird had arrived from specifically.

Although he was very glad to have it under his roof.

"Squack!"
"Crow!"
"Ahhhhwck!"

The red bird would cry!

Making the sounds of other animals it had heard.

Like wild birds.

It was a joy to have this bird around. He did not have a name, we called him red bird.

Although he did not have a name he made very many friends.

I had to let the red bird outside, I did this very many times, he could not fly.

He did have a perch outside.

Children would come along and see this red bird he would say:

"Squack!"
"Crow!"
"Ahhhhwck!"

"How are you today?"

This was a joy, the children would cheer on the red Bird.

It was an amazing sight.

They would all giggle delighted in the scene of a red bird speaking like a man.

"Very good!" replied the children.

This red bird was welcome in our homes and he was known to many.

This bird had a good reputation and it was known to many people.

He had a peculiar likeness to a fairy tale story.

In the distant land.

This bird could speak like a man.

I will always remember him for it.

He was taken away and purchased for a very good price.

I loved him.

I can't wait to see him again.

The Price of Growth

By Jonathan Olvera

Underneath the very blue sky, there I was. Presently, the times may be very difficult in a mathematical sense.

Many things were occurring, the banks were on impound of any land transferred they had nothing to do. It was very much understood it was worthwhile to become educated and train in labor.

I understood many subjects while I was growing up in this place.

I understood the pollen and the trees and also how flowers came to be.

I spent many days in prayer.

I did Fast and this was very good.

Time will always dictate that man should progress.

I saw many things that needed to be done.

It was work.

Many times I wonder when I would be delivered out of the harshness of the harsh desert, out of the demands of a violent Market.

It was not easy to accept new faith.

It was necessary.

Although it might seem impossible to listen and be attentive.

It has to be done.

It has to be done for health.

It has to be done for education.

It has to be done for progress.

Sometimes it is difficult to listen to the most important lessons in life.

I'm grateful I did listen to the voices in the sky above who did enlighten me to become more prepared and take pride in my work.

I will always have this in my heart.

I hope you do as well! Thank you!

Lost in Translation, Found in Japan

By Jonathan Olvera

One time I was very young and there wasn't very much opportunity in my state of residence.

I was looking for work and also a place to relocate.

There weren't very many options to take and the situation was dire.

I went to the airport looking for a Job.

and I ran into a group of people and they had fliers, they acknowledged the situation.

It was rare that people asked me if I wanted to go to Japan.
I was very embarrassed about the situation.

They invited me into a car and we went to eat burgers.

It was very clean and light.

It smelled like cheap plastic and perfume.

I liked these people.

It's like they knew me.

Three months later they asked me if I wanted to go to Japan.

I said yes!

I was thrilled!
I was so excited to be in a new place surrounded by new experiences.

I wanted to smell all the flowers, bathe in the sunlight - work and experience a slice of Japan.

I got on the flight and the people helped me every step of the way to go to Japan.
It was 13 hours!

I could hardly keep up with the Culture change.

Papers were changing and Food manners, new rules were being introduced.

When I got off the Airplane. I could not understand anything.

Someone told me to say "Nissin! Nissin!"

“It means hello.” A man from Japan said to me.

I was telling everyone "Nissin, Nissin!"

I wanted to greet everyone cordially.

Someone told me that means soup and if I was hungry they would feed me!

I was so embarrassed I couldn't wait to go home and tell my friends!

I was telling everyone “Nissin! Nissin!” instead of hello!

It must have been jet lag.

Super Bowl LIX

By Jonathan Olvera

The air is getting hot.

"Oh man it's getting hot!" I would say.

"All that working out! The Super Bowl is almost here!"

I was so excited I didn't know what to get first Chips, Soda, or some Hamburgers.

I could ask my mother for a couple of bucks to go to the local grocer.

It would be awesome to finish a season of long hours and book study with an amazing show!

The Super Bowl is now an official Holiday.

There will be Cheerleaders!

Good sum of Women!

There would be giants playing on TV, fighting over a ball.
I was ready!

I was still thrilled from the last season of Music and new Ideas to think about in bed.

It is difficult to keep up with all the Events!

I was not an athlete although I was very excited.

I was doing everything to go to the Super Bowl!
In the end I will be excited to see a good game and eat some Chips with some Hot chili beans and hot cheese!

I wish Everyone a good game.

The air is growing hot.

“Oh man, it’s getting hot!” I would say.

“All that working out! The Super Bowl is almost here!”

I was so excited that I didn’t know what to get first—chips, soda, or some hamburgers.

Maybe I could ask my mother for a couple of bucks to go to the local grocer.
It would be awesome to finish a season of long hours and book study with an amazing show!

The Super Bowl is now an official holiday.

There will be cheerleaders!

A good number of women!

There would be giants playing on TV, fighting over a ball.

I was ready!

I was still thrilled from the last season of music and new ideas to think about in bed.

It’s difficult to keep up with all the events!
I wasn’t an athlete, but I was still very excited.

I did everything I could to go to the Super Bowl!

In the end, I’ll be excited to watch a great game, eat some chips with hot chili beans and melted cheese!

I wish everyone a good game!

Grandma’s Magic

By Jonathan Olvera

Grandma was awesome; she always had the best ideas when I was 5. Everything that we did together was fun!

I loved baking cookies with her and playing outside with the dogs that were always at Grandma's house.

I always read the fairy tales in the book collection and spent time thinking of stories I could write!

I even believe in magic!

It could have been my grandmother's crazy antics like playing the Electric guitar or Making Exotic foods.

It has been exciting.

I have an Idea that I can do many things like travel the globe.

I can see many countries and write books everywhere I go.

Colors and chords!

All the time I have learned.

I will make my Grandmother proud.

Axolotl

By Jonathan Olvera

paedomorphic salamander

Axolotl was a small salamander; it meant he was able to float through ponds and rivers out to the Ocean if needed.

Really Axolotl was allergic to Ocean water.

The best thing to look forward to is " the sun shining down through the water." thought Axolotl.

Axolotl was a boy who was used to touching the surface of the water and feeling the vacuum of a black sphere tugging at the underwater world.

"I see you!" Axolotl exclaimed and bubbles were ejected from around his smile.

He could feel it was real, a black star or a Center sphere of energy different to the Sun or the Earth.

It was important because Axolotl always thought about his shape and how he became this funny salamander.

Could it have to do with the Sun or the Giant black sphere in the sky above the vacuum.

This made Axolotl dance and swim.

He was excited!

Stones were everywhere in the pond, sweet algae was forming out of the dirt and fungus gatherer on the water and multiplying in the sun.

The days were splendid.
I liked watching Axolotl. He was my pet.

He is what is called a paedomorphic salamander.

I will always like my pet friend.

The Cow and the Cucumber

By Jonathan Olvera

"Mooo!"
"Mooo!"
"Mooo!"

The cow was heard in the bright stead of the morning.

His name was Clover and the pasture he stood on was like his name.

It was very inspiring for me, a man of age Thirty to see this great animal who shared much of the likeness and desires of the company to which it was accustomed to.

"Good Morning Clover!" I would exclaim to the cow.

"You are never unnoticed." I told him.

Clover was attended to by a Ranch attendant and he was very eager to sell the feed for this Cow.

It was no more than forty dollars I did pay to feed the Cow - Cucumbers.

The cow, no stranger to the fondness of a shared emotion between two of the same stead and pasture, made his way over to me although there was a fence that ended the pasture and grew into the concrete slab that was a foundation to my living quarters.

He was close and the Cow Clover shook his head up and down asking for food.
Close by the door was the box of cucumbers Clover had seen by the door.
I walked over and I grabbed a cucumber.
I walked back to the fence and I gave it to Clover. He had a big mouth and it was lively so lively to me it seemed animated.

It was funny.

The cow was so good company and silly with gestures it made me think what more do animals like clover the cow have to offer away from the human nonsense of every day.

Clover liked cucumbers and I liked spending time with Him.

I gave him three more cucumbers.

Clover said "Mooo!" and I said "Goodbye clover!"

Clover was a good friend to make. I will always remember this Cow Pet.

Moo!
Moo!
Moo!

Clover’s call echoed across the bright morning sky.

He stood proudly in the pasture, his name fitting the lush green field beneath his hooves. As a thirty-year-old man, I found something inspiring about this great animal—his calm presence, his simple joys, and his easy companionship.

"Good morning, Clover!" I called out cheerfully. "You are never unnoticed."

Clover was well cared for by the ranch attendant, who eagerly sold me his feed. I paid forty dollars—no more, no less—for a box of cucumbers, Clover’s favorite treat.

Despite the fence separating us, Clover and I shared a silent understanding. He stood near the barrier where the pasture met the concrete foundation of my living quarters, bobbing his head up and down in anticipation. His dark eyes flickered toward the box of cucumbers sitting by my door.

Smiling, I walked over, picked one up, and returned to the fence. As I held it out, Clover eagerly took it, his large mouth animated and full of life. It was funny, almost cartoonish in the way he chewed—so expressive, so full of personality.

Spending time with Clover made me wonder—what more do animals like him offer beyond the daily chaos of human life? In his simple joy, there was peace, honesty, and an unspoken connection that required no words.

Clover loved cucumbers. And I loved spending time with him.

I handed him three more.

"Moo!" he bellowed, his voice deep and content.

"Goodbye, Clover!" I said with a laugh.

He was a good friend. A friend I would always remember.

The Great Galactic Streak

By Jonathan Olvera

The Sky Opened Suddenly the Halo of Sunlight began to warp around what seemed to be a warp hole.
"Come to me!" A voice called out.

"What is going on?" Exclaimed Muhammed.

Swirling now in a clockwise circle and expanding a Nuclear Tunnel into another platform a force with no gravity pulled Muhammed out of his porch into the Portal.
"Whoa!!" "Whoa!" Exclaimed Mohammed.

What came in was all that remained on the other platform, a Grey Stone smooth and repelling the surface of his skin.

"Oh what the heck!" " I can't stay here, I have to go home!"

The tail of this Vortex now spinning above his head in what seemed like a random result fruited the oddest of all in the

personal inventory of Mohammed: a pencil from School, a sheet of his bed, a joint and flint stone lock.

This was incredible! It was happening.
The colors and signatures around Mohammed were changing rapidly on the Flay grey surface.

"That is Amazing!"
"That is Very Terrifying!"
The colors changed from every day colors to colors he never imagined existed. He was changing dimensions.
"BOOM!"
The whole scene fried out .
"OUCH!"
Mohammed felt the grey stone shatter underneath his feet into what seemed to be the concrete on his porch.

"I'm back home here." thought Mohammed.

Until he looked up and saw a Flying Saucer in the air.

"What is going on!" Exclaimed Mohammed.

He went inside and nothing was the same.

"I'm losing my gosh darn mind!" Mohammed said to himself.
"Is this my house?"

"Mohammed, what is going on with you?" Asked his father.
He was naked and a Flying Saucer was in the air.

"Dad!" "What are you doing!" asked Mohammed.
"What the Heck!"
BOOM! BLAT!!

The Noise was heard as a hundred flying saucers were gathering into formation.
"What are you doing Mohammed?"

"This is a nudist community and I have to live naked."
"The aliens are now in control of all activities on Earth."
"Take your clothes off as well Mohammed, they are not needed during the alien invasion."

"Really!" asked Mohammed.

"Yes, son," said Father.

Mohammed took off all his clothes and was now nude.
"Everything we will now have to do nude, there is no longer any need for clothing."

Mohammed was very excited by this sudden change.

He walked into his home now nude with his father.

It was a very funny Change!

A Place Held Near

By Jonathan Olvera

This is a song I used to hear sung by one of the women in the local churches in my hometown. It is one of my favorites and It reminds me of angels hidden in plain sight.

The strings in the air hummed with joy!

All the men Re- joiced!

All my girls re - joiced!

For today we are blessed with sweet air.

Music played in my ear. Say my name to all my dear Angel friends.

I can hear God call my name!

Say again!

Say Aloud!

You're my son!

Grace, Love and Cheer!

I am here for my son.

Can't you see all I give for you to accept.

Look again at the Place I hold near you!

Young, fond and Sure of you.
Find it good I have blessed all your years.

In your hands I have placed my faith.

It is always a pleasure to share music with good people.

I Hate Reading the Bible (Until I Didn't)

By Jonathan Olvera

"Oh I hate reading the bible!" I used to say to myself.

"I'll never read that book completely!"

It was not always that I agreed with the entire routine: Go to school, Attend Church, Cut down on bad language and exercise.

I wasn't a Jesus freak or a ghost hunter, although there was something greater than the frame I was receiving.

I could see it in the sky.

The grandeur of the Night and the contrast of the breaking day -
It was speaking to me.

"Oh my gosh!"

I used to think to myself.

"Throw me a sign and let me see you!" I asked the Great untamed Pitch black expanse and the Echoes of a Million Tonnes of water.

I opened the bible through an idea to be more learned in scriptures in this manner I reasoned to myself the voice of guidance would be with me.

All the days I had accepted malice and wrongful ideas were behind me.

I accepted the church.

I accepted the bible and I rebuked evil.
In constant exercise and prayer I found the strength to push forward in this task and I did not regret it.

I was looking for an answer and the bible provided that for me.
I know I find my strength in prayer and exercise, study and work.
I am pleased to have read the bible and Understand the message of the angels.

Heaven’s Treasure Box

By Jonathan Olvera

The Sky was lightened by the starlight in the night sky. It was a usual scene of grandeur in the rock planet earth.

Time is a sense of change and many occurances on the face of this creation.
It reacted over so many times to the words of the great creator.

Once earth was a ball of fire, It was now becoming a Visible friend of sensical materials.

It was strange to see this on earth and the stars in the sky made safe passage for the kind works of the Guardians of The Creator.

The stars were many different colors.
White, Red, Yellow, Green, and blue.

They burned with the core of earth and made soft songs within the guidance of other giants like Jupiter and Mars.
Dancing in the pool of memories of the grand Work of The universe was all life was ready for.

It was awesome!

The creator made this and the Angels made it safe for the dancing fireballs to retire into the center of the earth and burn until the fuel had exhausted itself.

The face of the earth is full of thousands of blessings for Us to be thankful for.
The angels make all of it possible.

From Struggle to Strength: Overcoming Obesity

By Jonathan Olvera

Hello, Readers,

I have a story to share—one about my journey as an overweight person and how I found hope.

For a long time, food was more than just sustenance to me—it was my comfort, my reassurance that everything would be okay. The best part of my day was indulging in sugary biscuits for breakfast and cereal. I craved pork rinds, different kinds of chips, and soda.

Meanwhile, I lost many friends to the dark forces of the world. I saw people consumed by destructive paths, and in my loneliness, I turned to food.

Eat, eat, eat—I ate all the time.

As the years passed, I gained a significant amount of weight. By the time I reached thirty, I could no longer stand the reflection staring back at me. My body felt like a prison, weighed down by excess skin and fat, making me uncomfortable in my own skin.

I tried to lose weight, but my efforts seemed futile—until I turned to the Bible. It opened my eyes to the reality that my unhealthy relationship with food was harming me, not helping me. I realized I was fighting a spiritual battle as much as a physical one.

Work kept me busy, especially since there was a large steel order at the site where I was employed. But deep down, I knew I needed more than just a job—I needed a change.

For a year, I wrestled with the idea that I wasn’t powerless. I had options. I started praying, meditating, and learning how to fast. Soon, I found myself attending church.

It took great courage to admit to my elders that I struggled with obesity and was considering surgery to reclaim my health.

Determined to make a change, I enrolled in an online school. I viewed my refrigerator as my enemy, a constant temptation that I had to overcome.

One day, while sorting through my mail, I came across a contact for a local surgeon who was willing to help me. Before long, I was under the scalpel, and the fat that had threatened my life and sanity was finally gone.

Now, I have hope for the future. I have so much to look forward to, and for the first time in a long while, I feel free.

Thank you, readers, for your support.

Bubbles: The Chimp Who Changed My Perspective

By Jonathan Olvera

Bubbles was a chimpanzee born with two round, golden ears that resembled balls of sunlight. His full coat of dark, strong hair contrasted with his bare, oddly shaped face, giving him a unique and striking appearance.

His eyes held a depth that spoke volumes—not just about the chimpanzee he was, but also about the soul he seemed to carry within him.

His mother had darker skin, and Bubbles noticed this.

I noticed this.

It was during my journey to Kenya and the African plains that I first encountered a monkey. I found it fascinating that primates had made their home in Africa. Perhaps it was the abundant vegetation or the steady food supply that made the land so welcoming—a place where survival was almost promised by nature’s provisions.

Bubbles belonged to a group of chimpanzees I deeply admired. In some way, I saw reflections of my own nature in them. To me, Bubbles was more than just an animal; he was a sign—an answer to my prayers, a silent assurance from the Creator.

I began calling him my pet, not in possession, but in affection. Our bond grew, and through him, I learned about innocence, curiosity, and the beauty of growing up.

Bubbles was a strikingly handsome young chimp, and I couldn’t help but admire him.

Unfortunately, the path I was destined to follow led me away from the pastures of Chad and Central Africa. My journey took me to the United States, where my focus shifted to studying microbes and geology. Yet, no matter how far I traveled, the time I spent with Bubbles and his mother remains a cherished memory—a lesson in connection, wonder, and the simple joy of companionship.

Thank you, dear reader!

The Spirit of Saint Nicholas in the Southwest

By Jonathan Olvera

It was a bright and sunny afternoon as the year drew to a close. The sun began to cool, signaling a change in the season. In the vast southwest territory, the people endured the heat but held strong in their faith—faith in their work, in their homes, and in the kindness of Saint Nicholas.

Saint Nicholas had visited before, during the time of snow and abundant water. Oh, how the people labored under the sun! They worked in schools, in the zoo, in the kitchen—everywhere. And yet, no matter how hot the days became, they never forgot that Saint Nicholas had a home in the North Pole.

The animals and critters of the land had their place, too, just as those in the North Pole did. In the southwest, the people knew of the endless cool days that graced the Arctic, where treasures of the Earth lay preserved beneath the ice.

Together, they honored Saint Nicholas, for his work in the North Pole was never-ending. The animals listened to him, as did the angels in the sky. The lights of heaven guided Santa’s helpers, ensuring they made the right choices. And now, there was a list—a record of those who had behaved.

Saint Nicholas, or Santa Claus as some called him, had the power to prove his magic. If everyone behaved, he could ready his sleigh, ascend into the sky, and visit every household on Earth in just one night.

The North Pole was frigid—so cold that it preserved Saint Nicholas and his faithful workers. Yet, despite the icy air, he found warmth in small joys. Guided by the celestial lights, alongside the critters and workers of this planet, he delighted in hot drinks—coffee, cocoa, and sweet pastries. These simple treats fueled his spirit, helping to keep boys and girls on the path of goodness.

Saint Nicholas is always at work, spreading treats of sugar, the light of the sky, and the blessings of creatures from every home that believes in kindness.

In the southwest, the heat can be relentless. The work never stops. But in the midst of it all, there is always room for a good attitude, a friendly heart, and love for one’s neighbor. The critters, the workers, and even Saint Nicholas himself will remember those who are kind.

So be good. Listen to your parents. And in time, Saint Nicholas will visit, bringing warmth, joy, and the sweet taste of hot drinks and pastries on a more favorable day.

The Night of Shadows and Sweets

By Jonathan Olvera

The days were scorching, and the nights were dark. It was time for the sun to fade, making way for the long-awaited night.

The little critters craved more sugar. The pumpkins were ripe and ready to grow. After a year of hard work under the relentless sun, the people grew uneasy as shadows stretched beneath the moonlight. Tricksters were preparing, donning their costumes, ready to scare the darkness away.

The night was near—the night when everyone would disguise themselves, moving from door to door, collecting colorful candies while driving away evil spirits. This was the night to fill bags with sweets and treats, to wear masks and costumes, and to revel in the magic of Halloween.

The streets would glow with shifting lights as the children took over the darkness, playing freely, knowing nothing could defeat them on this night. The hotter the sun had burned through the year, the greater their hunger for sugar and adventure.

Ghosts and pumpkins would appear, wizards and witches would stir their bubbling cauldrons, and skeletons would whisper tales of tricks and treats from ages past. It was Halloween. A night to embrace the eerie and step into the unknown.

On this night, anything would be possible—one could soar through the sky on a broomstick or hear the calls of mysterious creatures from the shadows. The hounds would howl, the cats would prowl, and the air would crackle with an eerie excitement.

It would be spooky. It would be thrilling. Tricks would be played, and sugar would be devoured.

As Halloween draws near, take heed and prepare yourself. The shadows have lingered all year under the moonlight, but now it is time to send them away.

Good luck, and Happy Halloween!

A Dog from the Stars:

Woof! Woof!

By Jonathan Olvera

I wag my tail and wake up beside my partner. I have many plans for us today. Before the sun rises into the sky, I should wake him up. I should wake his mother too. I am excited for the day ahead!

I come from another place among the stars. My home is much smaller than this one. One day, I will take a man with me, and together, we will do many things.

It was long, long ago when I first arrived on this planet. I was following a stone. That stone led me here, and now I live among men. It is in my best interest to understand their species—to observe, to learn. And when the time is right, I will take one with me. It will be helpful for my home.

But I must be careful. Man must not notice. I study them closely, keeping track of their ways through the fur I shed. I use my mind to understand their behavior.

I have a dog, and that dog is man.

It will be a long time before the portal opens again. When it does, I will choose my companion and bring him to my small home among the stars. Our stars are much dimmer than the sun here. But for now, I am here, and I will take my mission seriously.

I will run, I will play, I will taste, smell, and drink the sweet waters of this world.

"Bark! Bark!" I call, and man knows I need his attention.

"Woof! Woof!" I say, and everyone understands me.

Here, I will have fun with humans and small critters alike. I will howl at the moon and bark at the sun. I enjoy being a dog on planet Earth.

A Good Friend.

Guidance from the Heavens

By Jonathan Olvera

This was a time in the history of mainland America—the Americas. It was a busy time for men, while women and children found comfort in the innocence of shelter. The work had to be done. Many days, the labor and order of this work were kept secret, and men had to battle for their purpose—to be useful among the cement and the animals in captivity.

Yet, I found hope. It shimmered in the stars above the ground. That light guided me as I sifted through the earth, searching for gold. I found work, though many others were less fortunate.

But I didn't even want to work.

Imagine not wanting to be in your own skin, longing to escape to a faraway land, to run and never look back.

I made time to study the Scriptures, to immerse myself in the Bible. Passage after passage, I sought understanding, using my wit and faith to grasp the depth of its words. Every day, I saw the angels and the guardian beasts of heaven reveal themselves to me. My belief grew stronger with each reading. My faith never wavered.

I came to understand that men are carnivores, bound by time and our place in creation. Cattle must be used for food. And so, I pray, asking the angels to bless my hands and my home, for there is always work to be done. It is a battle to rise each day and care for the flocks of the pastures God has created.

The greatness of the angels, both on earth and in the sky, has inspired me to write of the **guidance** they provide in my exercise, in my health, and in my spirit.

I pray and plead that everyone may find a place to kneel before God—to seek this holy guidance, to receive the breath of the Holy Ghost, and to embrace the blessing of eternity in the grace of our Creator and the warm embrace of the angels in the sky.

The Magic of Fall

By Jonathan Olvera

The sun rises, casting its warm beams over the land. The year is nearly at its end—it's September. I have stayed positive all year long, looking forward to every celebration.

The seasons are changing, and the sun's intensity is finally easing, bringing cooler days. It has been hot for so long! As the temperature drops, I dream of growing pumpkins. But they're all sold out! Everyone is eager to decorate, to compete, to take pride in their autumn displays.

There's so much to do—Autumn is coming! The leaves will turn golden and red. Ghosts and goblins will make their appearance. Pumpkins will be carved, and my costume will be ready for Halloween.

After Halloween, the focus shifts to feasting. Meals will be carefully prepared, berries blended with sugar to make jams, biscuits baked fresh, and leftover meats turned into rich, savory gravy. Cranberries will be enjoyed, and the lengthening shadows will cool the earth.

It's so exciting! Knowing the sun will take its brief rest, that winter will soon arrive. I'll wrap myself in a warm blanket, drink the hot chocolate I've been saving all year, and make rice pudding—what a treat!

Soon, Santa Claus will work his magic in a single night. This season reminds us to celebrate change, to savor new flavors, to appreciate the shifting colors of the world. I love celebrations. The deep oranges, warm browns, golden yellows, and rich reds of fall fill me with joy. In winter, I embrace the forest greens, the dark tones, the comforting spices of the season.

Then, the new year will arrive, bringing wonder. I will watch the stars soar across the sky, their light shining down on all of us, just like a dear friend’s presence during the holidays.

Birthdays are special, but there’s something magical about the earth completing its journey around the sun. Every celebration feels more meaningful.

I reflect on all of this—there’s only one day left until October.

I am grateful. Grateful for another year, another chance to face challenges, another opportunity to embrace life’s changes.

Summer is over. It’s time to prepare for autumn.

I can’t wait!

The Power of Habits

By Jonathan Olvera

Life is supposed to be simple. But the truth is, it's not—at least not all the time. People struggle, just like I do, to take care of the things that need to be done. It's difficult. Sometimes, it's even scary.

I had to make a decision. I was going to be strong—for myself. That's when I discovered something important: I had to learn the difference between a habit and a choice. I needed to change. I needed to grow up. I had to figure out what would help me move forward.

As a young man, I needed strength. I needed work. So, I started making extra money by cleaning. In my sober mind, I realized I was capable of so much more. I could think. I could communicate. I had good ideas. I could write books.

I'm grateful to be on this journey early in life. I know that developing good habits—engaging in meaningful conversations, being good company, and making smart choices—makes a real difference.

Health is something you only get one chance at. At the end of the day, even if you bring nothing home, you still carry the decisions you made to maintain a healthy, whole character. That realization changed me—not just for myself, but for those around me, even my cat and dog.

Everyday life is full of obstacles—washing the dishes, looking for work, staying clean, taking a shower, using proper language, picking up the yard, and being a good neighbor. Sometimes, habits can hold you back. But I've learned to keep a strong attitude.

It's not always easy to stay positive, but I made a decision to do just that. I've been working on it for a long time, and I like who I'm becoming.

I'm going to keep this attitude.

That's my decision.

President's Day!

By Jonathan Olvera

February was coming soon and the Excitement in the air was a joyous Sphere in the Local Venues, Restaurants, and plazas.
The People had their season to review the local policies and study the new contracts for the new seasons to come.
It was awesome.
A new leader was elected!
The POTUS it was called had taken office.
"Nice!"
"Awesome!"
"Cool!"
People would comment.
The times of the Territory were rough as always, decisions and transfers were always being debated and fulfilled for the best outcomes.
It was a very delicate and long task to fulfill, everyone would have a good input to have by President's Day.
All the season Young Men celebrated and gathered.
The new president had many things to do!
It was getting done.

This year will be one of the most memorable presidents' days! "Hooray!" "Hooray!" "Hooray!" I shouted! It is almost president's day!

The Accidental Prophet

By Dmitri Volkov

When I first arrived in Central America from the cold, unforgiving lands of Eastern Russia, I had only one goal: to make an honest living writing. I submitted my work to countless magazines, desperate to see my name in print. I called my pieces "scripts" and "blogs," though most editors called them "unpublishable."

Undeterred, I poured my soul into my writing, blending science and religion in ways that would either enlighten readers or deeply confuse them. To my surprise, people actually started reading my work. Encouraged by this, I paid little attention to the who and why, too busy basking in the joy of finally having an audience.

Then, exactly a year later, something strange happened—I was contacted by members of a local church. Not only had they been reading my work, but they had also turned my writings into

music. Yes, music. Songs based on my ramblings about the universe and divine energy were now being performed in churches.

I was honored. I was flattered. I was also slightly terrified.

They asked if I was a good person. A suspiciously specific question. Then they started investigating my background, as if I were some kind of spiritual leader. Before I knew it, people were treating me like a prophet. Me! A guy who once got lost in his own apartment because the power went out.

Naturally, I told them I was, indeed, a very good person (I mean, I don’t kick puppies or anything), and I promised to be a character they could believe in.

Looking back, it was a long, strange journey from Moscow to Central America, where people not only published my work but also turned me into an accidental religious icon.

And to think—I just wanted to be a blogger.

The Well of Change

By Jonathan Olvera

Changes occur in life many times. The air was thick with the exhaust of the nearby ocean and the volcanic activity beneath the small settlement.

Life revolved around the trade of items made from stone and water ventures. Trade was a daily routine, an unchanging rhythm of existence.

Although this was regular and seemed interminable, the social dance was abruptly interrupted by plumes of smoke and extreme temperatures. Times were changing.

It was a time when I had to take control of the future that lay before me. My daily routine became a personal obstacle course; I set challenges for myself constantly. I began to see the benefits of progress in the stone trade and in art.

I ensured my appearance, traded with good measure, and achieved social stature. My life was no longer just social—it became spiritual.

I prayed and worked.
I meditated and wrote.

Work was something that would pay off. I dedicated myself to digging a well, believing that one day, I would reach water—clean water.

I was joined by many people of different nationalities, and they assisted me. We traded and worked. We also made good friends.

One day, I reached water. I called everyone to prepare the well and step back, for soon it would fill. And it did!

My friends were amazed. At the end of our hard work, we had a well—and much water to sustain our trades.

It all began as a small idea—a seed of good faith and hard work. But in the end, it made a difference, proving that change, when pursued with perseverance, leads to something greater.

Thanks for reading.

The Divide: A Future of Order and Wilderness

By Jonathan Olvera

Our nation is a vast, flat surface surrounded by water.
Large and circular.

It was founded by men who mined gold and other precious resources.

Now, it is the year 4000, though time holds little importance to the inhabitants of **5-3009-1**—the name given to the Rock, a place containing all the elements necessary to sustain life. It stands in the void, surrounded by colossal objects scattered across the sky.

Time, as we know it, has been predicted to end and begin again. Religion shifts and evolves.

In our era, humanity has endured countless sacrifices.
The trees have withered.
Animals are slaughtered.
Men and children perish in endless wars.

Life fades, locked away in safekeeping.
The age of ignorance has ended.
Excess is inevitable, yet excess itself has become a resource.

"Oh my."
"How terrible."

James had slept all day, his head aching as he drifted through thought.

“How are you today, James?” his mother asked.

“My head hurts.”

“Have you been drinking water?”

“Yes, Mother,” James replied. **“I’ve just been thinking a lot.”**

Adjusting to life in America had been difficult for him. The world of 4000 was far removed from the society that had existed 2000 years before. Back then, trash littered the streets, and wooden, disposable structures defined the landscape.

The government had reshaped everything, eliminating waste and transforming society into a rigid, institutional system. Order through radical change—this was the new trend.

“What are you thinking about? You’re making me worried,” his mother said.

“I have so much to do and not enough time in the day,” James answered.

10,000 miles away, near the edge of the conceivable world—known simply as **the End**—the ground shifted. Rocks piled high, animals were counted and stored, and lizard-like creatures roamed the wilderness. Sand and stone were shaped and fused together, building something meant to last.

This was another society, one rooted in hunting, labor, and blood sacrifice. No one dared cross the boundary of rubble and dust. The debris was all that remained of a world destroyed and reshaped—a world that sought to endure beyond both order and chaos.

It was said that angels had appeared to many before the great destruction.
Blood sacrifice had become law—a sacred act meant to bring humanity closer to these celestial beings.

On the other side of the boundary, however, the new society was sterile and disheartening—a lifeless reflection of the desolation it sought to replace.

“The times are changing.
We can live here, sacrifice our food, and hunt monsters,” Bill said.
“Out there, we are wild. On Judgment Day, we can either be hungry children or prisoners.”

“It still sounds radical, even today,” Charlie replied.

He hesitated before asking, **“Can I ask you something? Have you ever seen one?”**

“Seen what?” Bill asked.

“An angel.”

Angels were not a rare sight.
Not in this time.
Not in any time.

This was an era of upheaval and struggle.
The laws that governed the planet had shaped the lives of many.
It was consuming.
The spoken word of God had been handed down to men on both sides.
And now, the angels watched.

On one side, wilderness.
On the other, institutional society.

This vision was given to the people of our time.

How do we interpret this message from the angels?
Are there other stories to be gathered?
And what can we learn from them?

Whispers of Lycea: A Feline's Mission

By Jonathan Olvera

The night was damp, and the air carried a promise—one meant for a cat like myself.

I could sense it with my whiskers and the feather-like hairs between my paws. This world, this *Sphere*, was unlike anything I had known on Lycea, the Exo-planet.

The air here has been kind to me.

"It's a little rough." Or *"Meew,"* I whine to the humans.

They know me as a feline, a cat. But I am more than that. My genetic sequence enhances my activity on this planet, making me more aware, more *productive*. I can listen, I can interact, I can *understand*.

I am on a religious expedition, tasked with investigating violence, disappearances, and the nature of carnivorous instincts. My teeth differ from those of my humanoid hosts—some might even call them *vampiric*.

Back on Lycea, there was talk of crude parcels, rolled stones, and the ambitious, rabid leaders of Earth. These discussions stirred the other cats.

We *purr*, we *meow*, we *taste the air*.

The deity of our stone has always protected us. Perhaps Earth, too, holds a purpose for us—though how, we have yet to discover.

Becoming familiar with humans was unsettling at first. Their towering forms startled me. The space in our solar system had shaped Lyceans to be smaller, more agile, more attuned to the unseen forces.

But still, it will be fun to *meow* and *listen* to these creatures.

Soon, the so-called *Sun* will rise in the sky—a terrifying thought for vampire-like cats such as myself. But as always, we will resume our mission, serving our masters and leaders on Lycea.

It will be an adventure.

And I am, above all, a friendly feline companion.

"Meow!"

A Hilarious Fall: The Christmas Morning Mishap

Logan Andrews

"What is going on?" I hollered! I was dizzy from the fumes of adhesive and the ongoing construction in the city. Christmas was near, and the season was changing. I quickly hopped out of bed to the sound of loud banging. Rushing to the stairs leading down from the second floor, I was almost at the second step when I slipped and began to fall.

"Ouch!" and "Darn!" I stubbed my middle toe, twisted my ankle, and tumbled more than halfway down the fifteen steps! I hit my head and broke my fall with my arm. "Ouch, that really hurt!" I thought to myself. I had to regain my composure and balance as the impacts were electric and shocking.

I was so curious about the construction noise that I had ignored my own safety, leading to this hilarious accident. To make it even funnier, I was dressed in bed trousers, a bathrobe I'd left on a hamper next to my bed, and carpet slippers—hardly an outfit for a dramatic fall!

Though I wanted to cry from the pain, I was still in one piece. Determined to figure out the source of the noise, I headed to my neighbor's house to ask if they'd heard what had happened.

"Yes!" they said, concerned. I sheepishly explained that I had fallen down the stairs. Their response? "I know! I heard a loud noise and someone holler 'OUCH'!"

I confessed that it was me, and we ended up laughing together. It was embarrassing, but also a moment to remember. After that, I made sure to be much more careful!

Rudolph’s Journey: A Test of Faith and Winter’s Promise

By Jonathan Olvera

It was not the best of times in the South Territory.
The winds from the North had not arrived.
The people and critters were restless and unsettled.
Yet, their faith in Saint Nicholas remained strong.

The hot days in the sun had driven away the cold winds.
The reindeer and all their companions were long gone.
The list of the Good and the Bad had not disappeared.
The will of the trees to grow young and bear flowers was strong.

Cocoa and coffee,
Sugar and stories,
Were being crafted.

It takes much for Saint Nicholas to rise from his seat,
But the faith of strong children is enough.
They work hard and behave
All year long.

When Christmas arrives, we all receive gifts—
A cold breeze,
A moment with a snowman,
A hot drink late at night,
A warm morning.

It is enough for all, in one night,
To believe Santa Claus is well,
In the North Pole.

"Oh, goodness, it’s hot!"

The climate in the South, beneath the North Pole, was unbearably warm for a reindeer.
This reindeer’s name was Rudolph.

"I’m very grateful I have plenty to eat this season," he said.
"But how is a reindeer like me supposed to go fetch Santa Claus?"

The time was changing.
Naturally, Rudolph the Reindeer was busy in the season.

"The pine cones look scarce down here!" he exclaimed.
"I know there are more up North!"

"I believe, and I know! Santa Claus is coming here soon!"

The wind blew, and the sun beamed down.
There were witnesses to Rudolph’s faith!

The Sun itself took notice.
"What should we put in the path of Rudolph the Reindeer?" it asked.
"I will play tricks on him! I am the summer heat, and you want me to go away!"

Rudolph could hear the trickery taking place.
It was not uncommon for the tricksters of the Sun to challenge faith in Santa Claus.

"You get out of here, you little devil!" Rudolph declared.
"I’ve had enough of your games! I know when he’s coming, and you are no one to take Christmas from me!"

High in the mountains, where the spirit of the North rested in the skies,
A great wind overheard their quarrel.

"I hear you both!" the wind bellowed.
"I hear you, Rudolph, and I hear you as well, Trickster.
I am the great Wind of the North!"

"Ho! Ho! Ho! The weather has not changed.
This is not a curse, but a test of faith!"

"I will listen to both of you high in the sky.
I promise the weather will change, and the cold will come upon you!"

"Rudolph, from now on, your nose will be red with the promise of winter!"

"And you, Trickster, I promise you this—
To bear witness to the Good and the Bad of boys and girls,
For the great Saint Nicholas."

And so it was done.

Rudolph, the reindeer from the South,
Who was headed North to seek Saint Nicholas,
Had his nose turn red.

The Trickster fell under enchantment,
Bound by the promise of relief from the blistering heat.

The great winter wished to come upon the Americas.

"Rudolph, you are a very faithful reindeer!" the Wind declared.
"Gather more reindeer who believe and have faith,
So that I may set a path for you!"

"Prepare for the season, and Merry Christmas!"

And with that, the North Wind carried the promise of winter forward.

The Life of a Laughing Clown

By Jonathan Olvera

I am a Clown!

I make jokes and I fill balloons with helium!

life is a long journey so I make time to write jokes and wear costumes.

It is good to have an audience.

Sometimes I make people laugh so much It makes me feel like the best at my job!

I wear paint on my face and I have very big shoes!

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" Haughty laughter.

I dont like bad jokes or lies!

I am a professional clown every story I have to tell will make anyone laugh.

I like Red balls, I like Green balls, I also like Yellow balls and Animals.

Greetings and laughter to all my audience.

When I got to work I make everyone laugh! I act silly and I make funny faces and Sounds!

I love my job!

Everyday is a funny story!

Funny Story

by Jonathan Olvera

I have a funny story to tell.

This happened to me in my neighborhood.

I thought I was cool.

I thought I had everything planned out.

I brushed my teeth. I had a big meal.

I went outside. I had things to do.

I need to use the bathroom. There was nowhere to go.

While I was walking it got hotter.

I was looking around! I need somewhere to use the bathroom.

I think to myself.

What is the bathroom?

when I have to use the toilet?

With so much Construction.

Along the path. I find a port-a-john.

I get inside the porta-john. It is terrible.

there's waste inside. I am not the first to use it.
It is hot.

This is my reality.

Then I think to myself. Should I continue?

Should I go home?

I should definitely continue. I need to pay the rent.

How embarrassing I was looking for work.

What is more embarrassing is to look at your shoes.

When there is no toilet paper, think about using a sock.

The good thing is. The whole thing could have been more embarrassing.

I could have had an accident.

That is my funny story to share with everyone.

ZaZa Happening: The Night I Was Taken

By Jonathan Olvera

I was out late at the comedy venue at the university downtown. The weather was nice, and I was enjoying the crowd and the blend of company.

There was a string of shops adorning the new street project, displaying the latest construction materials.

I enjoyed the comedy show, and afterward, I stopped by a local store to purchase rolling tobacco to smoke a cigarette.

So much work goes into theater; it really comes alive to me.

"It is a battle," I said to myself.

I was ready to leave the project and hail a taxi when a saucer lit up the road in front of me!

"Hot! Hot! Hot!"

"My head is hot!" I exclaimed as I was covered in a bright light and transported into the saucer.

"Have you seen it?" asked the little green men.

"What?" I asked. "I was just getting cigarettes!"

There was a giant lizard and little green men—grey ones too!

"I just have a couple of questions," said the giant lizard.

"What?" I asked.

"Time has changed," said the lizard.

"Yes, here! Time has changed here, giant lizard!" I exclaimed.

"Am I your God?" asked the grey man.

"It’s a story that sounds awfully familiar," I replied. "I was hoping it wouldn’t concern me… or any other green men or grey people!"

"What is going on?" I asked.

"Man was made to serve God," said the green men.

"If you can assist me," said the giant lizard. "I'm just concerned."

"Oh my goodness! You're a giant lizard!"
"Somebody help me!"
"My mother!" I yelled.

"I'm going unconscious," I said.
"It's awful!" And then I went into a coma.

"The radiation! Take the measures!" said the lizard to his men. "I have questions about this human species. Would they even honor or be civil? I wonder."

"We have a king!"
"Church is for children!"
"The temple is for men!" yelled the green lizard.

I was unconscious while the lizard continued yelling. A grey man took my body into his hands; he was very strong and pressed a button.

"My skin is burning!"

The light returned, and I found myself back on the street, lying among the crowd, all of whom were asleep.

I woke up and fetched some water, placing a wet towel on my head.

"I'm not sure exactly what that means," I murmured.
"I'm going to sit right here."

In the distance, people saw a disk in the sky and began pointing and exclaiming,

"Oh my goodness!"
"Did you see that?" they said.

"I did!" I exclaimed.
"It's all geometric!"
"It's turning around!" they shouted.

It turned on blue lights and took off at light speed!

I will never forget that night—a giant lizard stole my taxi and scared me very much!

It’s not every day you see a spaceship. And today...
"It is ZaZa happening... right here, here, here!"

Until the next visit.

A Grandmother’s Strength: A Journey of Love and Healing

By Jonathan Olvera

My Grandma was a good person who had lived through many years of social change.

It was always a challenge in our community to address illness and provide people with the medical treatment and nourishment needed to heal both the body and the soul.

As I grew older, the lessons my Grandma taught me became more and more relevant.

They were strong moral lessons—on being truthful, strong, and honest.

I tried my best to be that person, even though I knew that not everything in life was perfect.

As a young man, I began to experience a nightmare when I discovered unusual marks on the concrete floor that covered the topsoil and gave value to our property.

At the same time, during the dry season, my Grandma's illness worsened.
The dry air was harsh on her health, and she was diagnosed with cancer in her left lung.

Despite her illness, she always did her best—medicating herself, sharing literature, and teaching the young people she mentored.

We played board games, attended school, and researched everything we could about the illness that had taken over our home.

Eventually, we decided that surgery was the best option to remove the infection, and we hoped for the best—that my Grandma would recover.

It was an intense time.

I gathered my things after every healthy meal my Grandma prepared, and we prayed together.
I read books and made time to call different doctors, searching for answers.

Then, finally, I got lucky!

A doctor in town was interested in practicing a new procedure that could save my Grandma's life.
It was called chemotherapy.

She was treated with an injection, and now, she lives happily at home—much healthier than before.

I am forever grateful to everyone who helped me and my Grandmother.

Grandmother’s Recipes: A Taste of Love and Memories

By Jonathan Olvera

Grandmother always had a fantastic recipe to brighten the mood,
even in the most difficult times.
It was always a splendid dish to enjoy, no matter the season.

I’ve always been fond of the kitchen—searching through spices and vegetables,
Looking for the perfect blend of flavors to create something new.

But Grandmother always had the recipe.
I respected this.

Food was hard to come by,
Yet there was always milk, water, grain, salt, and even meat.
It takes great skill to craft a dish—
To make food taste delicious while nourishing the body with a hearty and healthy blend of ingredients.

I am always taken back by the smell of hot stones warming up in the morning and afternoon.
The sweet aromas of sugars and purées in my grandmother’s home
Are a fond reel of memories.

The best food always comes from Grandma.
I love my Grandma and her recipes.
One day, I will learn to make gentle, comforting food—just like my elders do.

Santa’s Promise: A Winter of Blessings

By Jonathan Olvera

Ho ho ho!"

It was heard somewhere around the North Pole.

Santa Claus was stirring.

The reindeer had been called to awaken.

There were very many things to do and take care of before the day of blessings.

Workers who had faith in this man and Saint Nicholas.

They were excited and exchanged many phrases.

"We have got to prepare the Bells!" They said,

"It must smell perfect to please the faithful."

They were anxious to prepare the seed of the trees to Adorn our Christmas scene.

Talks of beverages cold and hot.

"There are many things to complete before Santa Claus can take his flight!"

"In our work I find this possible!"

"Hooray!" All the workers shouted.

It is very exciting.

The time was Nearing, when Santa Claus would call upon the great winds and ask

for the sake of the families in need to bring along and cold Christmas all good men

were promised.

"Come now winds from the south!" Santa Claus said.

"Come now winds from the north and the east as well."

"Come now wind from the West!"

"I have much good faith in the work being done."

"I test very much the faith of our young."

"Pass me now the list of the faithful and obedient."

"I Will Bless these homes!"

All of this could be said. Man trusted Santa Claus. If something were to be done and it was done in good faith. There was no doubt in our hearts that Santa Claus would come. The trees would grow and Bloom. The flowers would be collected and cut according to the word of Our Lord in our time.

Workers will get up and shave stones to make Mary bells and jingle.
The dogs would bark and cheer on.

The time I come for good faith and patience to overcome.

"Be merry be merry!" "Do not be short in your faith!" Santa Claus will come.

Weather was hot and the sun was high in the sky. The months had passed. It was now time for the darkness to bring in cold weather from the north.

"Come now North Wind!" "Let us move to the South to bring good weather!" It was done.

This was a big task for Santa Claus. To rely on the faith of men and women.

This chill was felt everywhere and everyone knew what Santa Claus could do.

The people were eager. To see this great man.

The bakeries made cookies.

The chocolatiers made hot drinks.

The nuns made eggnog.

And good pupils made decorations.

Santa Claus is coming and he's bringing snow.

Prepare yourself and be good! There's much work to do!

The End.

Good Night, My Child: A Journey into Dreams

By Jonathan Olvera

The moon rises in the ocean of darkness.

It is nighttime.

It is time to rest.

To put away the thoughts
That keeps young boys and girls awake during the day.

We have brushed our teeth.

We have eaten our grain.

Now, we await the days ahead after a good night's sleep.

Oh, how exciting the dreams will be!

Guardians and knights,
Clouds and dragons—
So many adventures await us in our sleep.

We have played and laughed,
Shouted and run,
Our clothes now soiled from the day’s fun.

But now, we are exhausted.

In the morning, the sun will rise.
Its rays of sunshine will greet us.
The sky will say,
"Good morning, my children."

But for now, it is time to sleep.
Farewell in your dreams.
Good night, my child.

The Spark of Discovery: A Student of Benjamin Franklin and The School of Electricity

As written by Jonathan Aloe Vera Olvera, a Student of Benjamin Franklin and The School of Electricity

Zap!
Crackle!
Zap, crackle, zap!

Late at night, I was awake, restless with hundreds of ideas filling my brain. The memories of my journal and my progressive attitude toward my studies filled me with excitement. Every idea, every note I jotted down, seemed to ignite something in me, like sparks from the very electricity I hoped to master.

"I need to find the dimensions of this proton," I murmured aloud, as my thoughts spiraled deeper into the realms of physics, the building blocks of everything I had come to understand.

I was always talking to myself. It was a habit, one I couldn't shake, but it had become an essential part of my thought process. I needed to speak my thoughts to fully grasp them, to make sense of the chaos in my mind.

"I have a dream," I continued, "I know I will succeed."

Each day, as the sun rose, I faced a new challenge. The day was a direct challenge to the limits of my understanding, to the confines of my own thoughts. The sun's daily rise felt like a push against my inner walls, urging me to grow, to go beyond what I knew, to stretch further than before.

How frustrating!
Success is not impossible.

The frustration was real. My mind often raced ahead of me, chasing ideas faster than I could grasp them. The relentless drive for progress sometimes felt like a weight—one that I carried with determination, but it wasn’t easy. The path I had chosen was filled with obstacles, both internal and external, and I had to wrestle with my own doubts.

But anger, though powerful, could be a double-edged sword. It was a motivating force, yes, but it could also cloud my judgment if I let it take control. So, I worked hard to focus, to channel that energy into something productive. It was all part of the process, part of my journey toward mastering electricity.

I was grasping the basic idea of resource collection, making it work for me. How far I had come from being idle was a testament to my efforts. In the beginning, I had been aimless, unsure of how to take the first step. But now, I saw a path, a series of steps I could take to move forward. It wasn’t a straight road, but it was a road nonetheless, and I was walking it with purpose.

My brain was whirring constantly. It was always on, buzzing with ideas, with thoughts of what to try next. Sometimes, it felt like I couldn’t quiet it down. Sometimes, I wasn’t sure if this restlessness was caused by exposure to so many new concepts or if it was simply my mind's relentless push to continue the work I had been taught to finish.

There was no end to the questions. No end to the curiosity. Every answer I found seemed to lead to more questions, and I knew I had to keep going. The pursuit of knowledge, of discovery, was a path I couldn’t abandon.

Food was something I had always taken for granted. But now, it had become part of the equation. Fuel. It was as simple as that. Food wasn’t just about sustenance anymore; it was about providing the energy I needed to continue. I couldn’t afford to waste time on distractions. Every moment was precious, and I knew I needed to make the most of each one.

"Progress always needs a good friend," I reminded myself, as I scribbled the words into my journal. I had read somewhere that it was important to find a good mentor, a guide who could lead you through the struggles of discovery. But for me, at this point, it was more about inner reflection. I was learning to rely on myself.

The process of quarrying metal, forging it, and preparing it for use to deliver electricity had become my obsession. It wasn't just about gathering resources anymore. It was about understanding the materials, about connecting them to the world of electricity in a way that made sense. The metal itself, cold and unyielding, had become a kind of puzzle I was determined to solve. Each piece I collected, each scrap I turned into something usable, was a small victory—a step closer to my ultimate goal.

The great open sky above me was a constant reminder of the possibilities. It stretched endlessly, a vast canvas waiting for me to paint my mark on it. The sky wasn't just a physical space; it was a symbol of the challenges ahead. Every time I looked up, I thought about the boundless potential of electricity and how, one day, I might be able to harness it, to control it.

The idea of erecting a post to serve as the foundation for my experiments was a challenge, one I welcomed. I knew it wouldn't be easy. But then again, nothing worth doing ever was.

Challenge the sky, challenge electricity itself, I thought to myself. I had to push against the limitations of both the physical world and my own understanding. I had to break through the barriers that had been set for me. Electricity was mysterious, elusive, but I was determined to unravel its secrets. I would be the one to master it.

Soon, I will master the dimensions of electricity and wield them in my hand! I imagined the power coursing through me, not as a mere observer, but as someone who could shape it, direct it, control it. This was my dream, my calling. The idea thrilled me, and I felt the spark of possibility growing stronger within me with every passing moment.

I spent a lot of time thinking about it, making plans, keeping notes. My journal was filled with scribbled equations, diagrams, and half-formed ideas. None of them were as perfect as the work I had seen from my teacher, Benjamin Franklin. His experiments, his discoveries, were awe-inspiring. They showed me what was possible. But they also reminded me of how far I had to go.

I had so much to learn. I wasn’t there yet, but I could see the path before me. It was winding, filled with challenges, but it was a path I was determined to follow. The discoveries I had made so far were small, yet significant. Each new understanding was a building block, a piece of the larger puzzle that I was trying to solve.

"I will continue my efforts, and I will succeed," I wrote in my journal, reaffirming my resolve. I was driven by an unyielding belief in myself and my mission. There would be setbacks, there would be failures, but I would not stop. I would not give up. This was just the beginning, and I was ready to face whatever came next.

I didn’t know exactly when I would unlock the mysteries of electricity, or when my experiments would bear fruit. But I knew that as long as I kept pushing forward, kept questioning, kept learning, I would one day wield the power I sought. And when that day came, I would be ready. For now, all I could do was keep working, keep dreaming, and never stop moving forward.

A New State

By Jonathan Olvera

It was a grand scene, a vivid panorama of colors painting the horizon, another morning in the new state. The sky was a muted orange, transitioning into a blinding blue, and the land stretched out before me—barren yet full of potential. The roads, though rough and arid, carried the legacy of ancient civilizations. The early light spilled over the cracked earth and sparse vegetation, casting long shadows across the horizon.

"Coffee in the morning is how I wake up," I said aloud to myself, my voice cutting through the silence of the desert.

"How quick," came the reply from within me.

"Satisfying for me," I muttered, taking a sip from the mug in my hand, feeling the warmth seep into my tired bones.

The day ahead was yet another reminder of the struggles that defined this place. It was not unfamiliar—racism and inequality still seeped into the bones of this new state, despite the promises of change. The lack of mechanical devices, the scarcity of resources, the jagged divides between the people; they all

contributed to the same old song of division. The inequalities were so deeply rooted, it was as if they had become the foundation on which everything was built.

I sighed, feeling the weight of it all. But I could not stop. I had to push forward.

"It is an excellent choice to make your company," I said aloud to myself, repeating the speech I would give to my new partner, the promise I had just made in contract. The messenger had already been sent to negotiate the terms. It was all carefully planned, all part of the intricate game I had learned to play. Notes, papers, language, and political campaigning—these were the tools of my trade. My family had always been in this business. It was second nature to me now.

I paced back and forth as I rehearsed the words, imagining the conversation ahead. I had long grown accustomed to the shifting tides of power, but I could not ignore the sense of unease in the pit of my stomach. It was a tightrope walk, balancing ambition and morality. And sometimes, it felt like I was standing at the edge of a cliff, waiting for the wind to push me into the unknown.

"It reeks like bears and coyotes!" I said aloud to myself, practicing how to deter predators. There was something about the land here, something wild, untamed. It wasn't just the wildlife; it was the people too. There were factions everywhere, struggling for control, clawing for dominance in a landscape that didn't seem to care either way.

The roads of the Roman Empire had led me to the Southwest desert, and I was becoming accustomed to it, despite the overwhelming heat and dust. The air felt thick, as if each breath was a battle. Yet, despite the discomfort, I couldn’t help but feel a strange connection to this place. It was as though the land itself was speaking to me, urging me to stay, to make my mark.

"I have an itch," whispered my conscience, the quiet voice that always accompanied me, questioning my every move.

"Gathering stone," I replied absentmindedly, letting the words drift into the air. "It's all about the foundation."

"Yes, I am grateful. My heart does beat." The conscience was always there, ever-present, and sometimes, it was the only voice of reason.

"Let every day be the same," I muttered, staring out into the distance. The landscape was a mirror to my thoughts: vast, barren, yet full of possibility.

It was becoming common for me to talk to myself. The general population here, they weren’t happy. They weren’t accepting of the governance, of the leadership that I and others had helped put in place. There was dissatisfaction in the air—an undercurrent of unrest. And yet, despite the turmoil, I couldn't give up. I couldn't walk away.

"It’s disappointing," I said, shaking my head as I reflected on the state of things. "But I hate to tell you, I must continue."

I looked around at the people, the workers, the traders, the families—so many lives intertwined in a system that seemed to care little for their individual struggles. "Although many would like to think otherwise," I said to myself, my voice tinged with bitterness, "I will prepare for the road ahead."

The road ahead was unclear, but I would not falter. Giving up was never an option for me. It was a silly idea, one that didn’t belong in my world. The challenges here were big, yes, but I had come here for a reason. I had a purpose that could not be ignored. I was part of something larger, something that would take time to build and even longer to change.

Young and full of ideas, I saw social programming as the next path to personal contracting. It wasn’t just about money or power—it was about restructuring, about offering something to those who had been left behind. The idea was new, yes, but it was a seed I was ready to plant. There was much work to do, and

though the odds seemed overwhelming, I was determined to see it through.

"Can I do it again?" I whispered to myself, staring out at the endless desert. "Go against the riots and the corruption? Fight for something good in a place where everything feels wrong?"

It was a challenge, yes, but one I was ready to complete. I had faced challenges before. I had fought against the currents of time and tradition. But now, it wasn’t just about winning. It was about changing the system, about finding ways to bring people together, about offering a new path forward—one where everyone had a chance, regardless of their background.

The contract that I would soon present was more than a business deal; it was a promise. A promise to those who had given up hope, to those who had never been given a chance to succeed. It was a promise that one day, the inequalities here would be addressed—not by force, not by power, but through understanding, through dialogue, and through true leadership.

I took another sip of my coffee, watching the sun climb higher in the sky. The day was heating up, and the work ahead would be difficult, but I knew I was ready. I had always been ready for a challenge. And this one, this one would be different. Because this time, I was fighting not just for me, but for everyone.

I turned to face the horizon, the vast desert stretching out before me, knowing that it would take time. But change would come. And I would be at the forefront, shaping the future of this new state, one step at a time.

Coins on the Cobblestones

By Jonathan Olvera

“I need a bottle of liquor,” said the blonde man, his voice calm but firm. His blue eyes scanned the street ahead as though searching for something more than the bottle he had requested.

It was early summer on a European project—the kind that drew expats and dreamers from all walks of life. The cobbled streets of this small United Kingdom town seemed bathed in a soft golden light, and the air smelled faintly of fresh rain and blooming flowers. Somewhere in the distance, a church bell tolled, its low chime marking the late afternoon hour.

“I drink the liquid,” a rough voice interrupted. The blonde man turned slightly and noticed a beggar seated on the corner of the bricked path. The man’s clothes were tattered, his face weathered by years of hardship, and his fingers nervously fidgeted with the fraying edge of his coat.

The blonde man raised an eyebrow. “Did I give you money?” he asked, his tone neither harsh nor particularly kind—just curious.

“No,” said the beggar, shaking his head.

“Do you need more money?”

The beggar hesitated for a moment, as though weighing his answer carefully. Then, with a shrug, he said, “I like cigarettes.”

The blonde man’s lips curved into a faint smile. “And I like wine,” he replied.

The beggar’s eyes lit up slightly. “I like the smell of cigarettes,” he added. “It makes me feel better.”

“I see,” said the blonde man, nodding thoughtfully. The street was quiet, save for the distant sound of children playing and the occasional rumble of a passing car.

“I could use a couple of pounds,” the beggar said after a pause, his voice low but hopeful.

Without a word, the blonde man reached into the pocket of his neatly tailored coat and pulled out five coins, each valued at one pound. He bent down slightly and placed them carefully on the ground in front of the beggar.

“Well, that’s what I like to do,” he said with a small shrug. “You can call me Wayne.”

The beggar’s eyes widened in surprise. “Yes, yes!” he exclaimed, his voice trembling with gratitude. “Oh my goodness!”

Wayne chuckled softly. “Good day to you, and everlasting joy,” he said, tipping an imaginary hat before turning and walking away.

As he strolled down the bricked path, his thoughts began to drift. *The shortcomings of humanity—the pain of hunger,* he mused, his mind turning over the brief encounter he'd just had. There was something humbling about the simplicity of the exchange. *The nature of an adult is fascinating,* he thought.

He glanced around, taking in the sights and sounds of the small town. The soft pastel colors of the buildings, the hanging flower baskets swaying gently in the breeze, the quiet buzz of conversation from a nearby café—it all felt oddly surreal, as though he were walking through a painting.

How quickly things can change, he reflected. Just a moment ago, he had been a man searching for liquor, and now he was thinking about the fragility of human existence. Life was strange that way—full of unexpected moments that could shift your perspective in an instant.

As he walked, Wayne's mind wandered back to his own past. He had not always been the well-dressed, confident man he appeared to be today. There had been times when he, too, had struggled—when he had been lost, hungry, and unsure of where his next meal would come from. He remembered sleeping on park benches, counting the coins in his pocket, and wondering how he had ended up there.

Those days felt distant now, but they had left an indelible mark on him. Perhaps that was why he had stopped to talk to the beggar. He knew what it felt like to be invisible, to have people walk past you without so much as a glance.

Wayne sighed and ran a hand through his blonde hair. The sun was beginning to dip lower in the sky, casting long shadows across the street. He decided to stop at a small café for a drink. The place was cozy, with mismatched chairs and a chalkboard menu listing the day's specials. He ordered a glass of red wine and took a seat by the window.

As he sipped his drink, he watched the world go by. A young couple strolled hand in hand, laughing at some private joke. An

elderly woman walked her tiny dog, pausing every few steps to let it sniff at the flowers. A group of children chased each other around a lamppost, their laughter ringing out like music.

It was a grand scene, Wayne thought—a reminder of the beauty and complexity of life. And in that moment, he felt a deep sense of gratitude. He was grateful for the wine in his glass, for the warmth of the café, and for the simple fact that he was alive.

He thought again about the beggar. What would the man do with the money he had given him? Would he buy cigarettes, as he had said? Or perhaps a meal, or a warm drink? Wayne would never know, and that was okay. It wasn't about controlling what happened next; it was about the act of giving itself.

As he finished his wine and prepared to leave, Wayne felt lighter somehow, as though a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He stepped back out onto the street, the evening air cool against his skin.

His day had been absolutely fantastic, he realized. And for a brief, humbling moment, he imagined a different life. *I could be a beggar,* he thought. *I could be sitting on that corner, waiting for a stranger to drop a coin at my feet.*

But today, he wasn't. Today, he was Wayne—the blonde stranger who had given a beggar five pounds and walked away with a little more hope in his heart.

The Thirteen Stars and the Miracle of Fire

by Jonathan Olvera

It was a hot and red sky under thirteen shiny stars, burning with hope and promise, when a child was born.

The air, thick with the acrid scent of salt and spice, carried a heat so fierce it seemed to burn the very bones. The bazaar—a

cacophony of bartering voices, the clink of metal, and the flutter of merchants' wares—was barely audible over the distant crash of the waves. Yet, beneath all this, the baby's first cry rang clear, a sound more powerful than any symphony played by nature itself. It was not unusual for a baby to be born unto a humble family, surrounded by the lively stirrings of everyday life. But this birth was different. This birth was a scene to remember off the fiery coast of Sidon, where destiny was woven not in the fabric of men, but in the very elements that shaped the world.

A mound of moss and cobalt spewed an urn of ash and sod into the ocean, becoming alive with liquid fire that splashed against the waters, tugging at my skin, its heat pulling at my very essence. The salty liquid turned to steam, rising in a misty veil that obscured the heavens. The ground beneath my feet vibrated with the rumble of ancient forces stirring, forces I had long sought to control, to bend to my will.

I covered my face, shielding my eyes from the stinging mist.

"The Lamp," I whispered to myself, my fingers tightening around the warm brass. The lamp had been my burden, my salvation, and my curse. It held secrets beyond the understanding of men, power beyond reckoning. It had granted me riches, wisdom, and dominion over the forces of nature, yet even power must be tempered with humility. My time with the genie had come to an end. I had taken much. Now, I had to give.

"I must get it to the child."

The waves crashed against the shore as I made my way to the humble dwelling where the newborn lay swaddled in cloth. His cries echoed faintly, softer than those of other children, as though he had already sensed the weight of the world resting on his tiny shoulders. He was no prince, no heir to a great throne, yet destiny had marked him in ways the world could not yet see.

I knelt beside him, the lamp held close to my chest. The genie inside was exhausted from my demands. His power had faded

over time, but he still lingered—waiting for a new keeper. It was time to repay him, to grant him a new purpose.

I took a deep breath, steadying myself. "It’s time," I whispered.

I rubbed the lamp three times, just as I had done countless times before, and the air crackled with unseen energy. From the swirling mist that rose from the sea, he emerged—a being of light and shadow, formed from the very elements that shaped the world. The steam and salt from the coast coalesced around him as he took form. His presence felt like both a comfort and a threat, a reminder of everything I had gained and everything I had lost.

"Esquire? What is it?" The genie’s voice was both gentle and commanding, yet beneath it, I sensed a deep weariness.

"It is time I hand you off to a child," I said, my voice steady but filled with emotion. The weight of this moment pressed down on me, as if the universe itself was holding its breath.

The genie tilted his head, his ethereal eyes narrowing, and for a brief moment, I saw a flicker of something ancient in them—something that had seen centuries of masters come and go. "A child? You would bind me to an infant?"

"Not bind," I corrected, my voice firm with conviction. "Entrust."

The genie folded his arms, considering my words. His form shimmered in the moonlight. "And what will the wishes be?"

I looked down at the baby, his tiny fingers curled into fists, his breathing steady and pure. The weight of the moment pressed upon me. This was not merely the passing of an object but the transferring of fate itself. I had to choose my words wisely.

"I wish to control the moon and the tides of the sun," I began, my voice resonant with the power of my request. "That he may understand the balance of light and darkness, of rise and fall."

The genie nodded slowly, his expression unreadable. "And the second wish?"

"I wish upon Zeus the strengths of all burdens." My heart pounded in my chest as I spoke the words. "That he may endure hardship, yet never be broken. That he may carry the weight of the world with honor."

The genie studied me, his form shimmering like a mirage, caught between the realms of the earth and sky. "And your final wish?"

I exhaled, a long, steady breath that seemed to carry the weight of years. I looked once more at the child, this fragile yet mighty soul destined for greatness. "I wish to collect the wages of my nature until the end of time. That my essence, my lessons, my wisdom, be carried within him. That my spirit may guide him, even when I am gone."

The genie smiled—a rare, knowing smile. "These are humble wishes indeed."

I placed the lamp beside the child, my hands trembling slightly. "He will be your new keeper."

The genie nodded, bowing slightly, an act of acknowledgment and reverence. "Then it shall be."

A golden light wrapped around the infant, an ethereal glow that softened the edges of the night, and the genie receded into the lamp. The air settled, the sea calmed, and the sky shimmered with a strange, otherworldly light. The child did not stir, yet something in the universe had shifted. The weight of time itself seemed to bend around him, and for a moment, I feared that the balance of the world had been irrevocably altered.

I stood, feeling the weight of my years, knowing that my journey had reached its end. The future now belonged to him.

"Farewell, Genie," I whispered, a tear slipping from my eye. "And return to me soon."

For though my story had ended, his had only just begun.

As the years passed, the child grew into a man unlike any other. He was neither ruler nor warrior, yet his presence commanded the respect of all who crossed his path. The wisdom of the tides, the strength of burdens, and the essence of a soul long departed were all within him. Yet, he never sought glory or adoration. His path was one of quiet grace.

I watched him from afar, not as a father, not even as a mentor, but as someone who had once held the power to shape the world and now had no need to do so. The lamp remained with him, a silent guardian, its power awakening only when destiny deemed it so.

Miracles followed in his wake, though few recognized them for what they were. Crops flourished in barren lands, the sick found healing in his presence, and even the stars seemed to align in his favor. But the greatest miracle was not of magic or power—it was the heart within him, the heart of a man who bore the wisdom of the ages yet walked humbly among his people.

He did not seek to rule. Instead, he chose to calm the storms of men’s hearts. He healed not through grand displays of power, but through quiet acts of kindness. Those who met him said little, but when they spoke of him, their voices trembled with reverence. Some called him a prophet. Others, a sorcerer. But those who knew the truth simply called him what he had always been—a keeper.

And so, the story of the lamp and the genie lived on, not as a tale of greed or ambition, but as a testament to the greatest miracle of all: the ability to choose wisdom over power, compassion over conquest, and love over legacy.

There were those who whispered of the lamp's power, of its long journey from master to master, each one more desperate than the last, each one seeking something the world could never offer. Yet the true keeper was the one who understood that power was not meant to be seized, but carried. And in the quiet moments

when the winds blew just so, the lamp would stir, waiting for the next keeper, the next moment when the stars would align once more.

Perhaps, one day, when the stars align again, the lamp will find another keeper, and the story will begin again.

Xeiph Custin: Last of the Void

By Jonathan Olvera

The moisture across my cool grey skin felt odd. I was used to this precipitate in my time on the Earth.

My life was complicated.

Xeiph was my terrestrial name. Custin was my underwater name.

Within the Milky Way, it was strange to be a cold-blooded and underwater being. Sometimes, I did not know what to make of it or what to think.

'I am here,' I thought to myself.

The atmosphere in the Milky Way was different. I knew it by the way I came to understand English and the need for water.

Existence here was complicated, and the riddle lay in building a way out of the Solar System.

Reflections were a silly idea. Everything was so definite—more than just this terrestrial existence.

'Xeiph Custin,' I thought to myself. 'Alien to Earth.'

It was difficult to remember how I ended up in the cabin of a chrome capsule, suspended by hyper magnets and precious diamonds. The underbelly of the craft had expended itself, and it seemed as though the suspension of my home planet had wiped away memories, leaving them void within the Milky Way.

I turned on the magnet and pulled in towards the core of the Earth. Clouds turned, and winds swirled. The darkness of the Earth consumed the rays of the sun and gave passage to giant, steamy, black rain clouds. The rain fell, giving hope to Xeiph Custin—hope that Earth was livable.

But hope was not enough.

I needed to know if survival was truly possible. I stepped out of my capsule, my webbed feet sinking slightly into the damp soil. The coolness of the ground sent a pulse through my limbs, a reminder of the oceans I had once ruled. I had spent years adapting, adjusting to the atmospheric changes, but could I ever belong?

A distant rumble echoed through the sky. The rain intensified, cascading in thick sheets. I tilted my head upward, allowing the water to cleanse the lingering uncertainty clinging to my being. My gills flared, absorbing the moisture, and for the first time in what felt like eternity, I breathed fully.

Perhaps I had been running from the truth. My planet was gone, wiped from existence. The diamonds and hyper magnets that had carried me through the cosmos were remnants of a civilization that no longer existed. There was no returning home. Earth was all that remained.

I reached forward, pressing my hand against the trunk of a towering tree. The bark was rough, warm—a stark contrast to the metallic walls of my capsule. It was real, alive, and breathing just as I was. My fingers traced the grooves, feeling the pulse of the planet beneath my touch.

Maybe I wasn’t just an alien to Earth. Maybe Earth had been waiting for me.

A deep exhale left my lips as I turned back to my capsule. I had spent too much time looking to the stars for answers when they had been beneath my feet all along.

Xeiph Custin, last of my kind, survivor of the void. No longer seeking a way out.

But rather, a way to begin again.

I ventured forward, my webbed feet pressing into the damp earth, carrying me deeper into this alien world that was now my home. The air was thick with moisture, carrying the scent of wet soil and life itself. Strange creatures, small and fragile, scurried

in the undergrowth, their beady eyes reflecting the dim light that pierced through the canopy above.

I crouched beside a pool of water, gazing at my own reflection. The ripple of the surface distorted my features, but the eyes remained the same—deep, endless, searching. I reached in, feeling the liquid wrap around my fingers, familiar yet foreign.

A rustling sound snapped my focus away from the water. Something—or someone—was nearby. I remained motionless, listening. The footsteps were hesitant, cautious. Slowly, I turned my head.

A human.

It was a young one, no more than an adolescent, with wide eyes filled with curiosity and fear. They clutched a crude weapon—a broken branch—as if it could protect them from whatever they believed me to be.

We stared at one another, frozen in the moment. Two beings from different worlds, yet here we stood, breathing the same air, sharing the same ground.

I raised a hand slowly, palm open, a universal sign of peace. The child hesitated but did not flee. They lowered their weapon slightly, their small frame trembling in the cold rain.

Perhaps Earth had not just been waiting for me.

Perhaps it had been waiting for us—to understand one another.

A new beginning, not just for me, but for both our kinds.

Joseph Stalin

By Ashur Namik

Nationalism in Moscow was on the rise. The socialist victories of the Great War and the rapid advancements of a platform community were the trademarks of the decade.

I experienced my share of confusion interpreting this transition of authority. Leadership is the valiant effort of the sons of our mother, and progress within was defined through hard work.

Definitely, the boots and trousers worn by the community groups and authorities around the borders of North America and Mainland East America symbolized this transformation.

"It is a battle," I breathed to myself.

I was accustomed to paying close attention to the scenery and always retaining as much detail as possible about what was happening around me and my home.

The objective was to meet the requirements to join the mining expedition and be able to look under the trees in the forests of Moscow and scream, "Gold! I found gold!"

It was a sweet reel and a memory that I have always retained for my heart's good health.

"What is there to do today?" I thought to myself. "Any new tasks?"

I grasped the footing rest at the bottom of my feet into the cushion in my boots, which I had afforded with a bout of good luck while looking for a job at the grocer's.

I stepped onto the balm off the porch, where I had just come to full consciousness after the discussion at home about job hunting and achieving success.

The billboard of the Reichstag was up. It displayed precise instructions:

Surveillance State - Arizona Territory and Moscow, Russia
The population of Arizona has access to a calculator and a marker/computer. To mark work hours, where a human would be hunting animals, a person would be making a killing. The point system is stored on a device with the specific signature of the U.S. Government to Administration, designed to fit the given form and spreadsheet. All work is done individually and double-checked using human verification. Nothing is completely electronic or automated.

KGB
Community Bureau Groups:

- Labor and Trade Office – Closed
- New Neighborhood Services – Migration Internationale

The territory had been invaded by North American troops and their rapid advances in mining and pan-resource labor expeditions.

It was tense. The 'Whites' were under the leadership of Lenin and several Assyrian men. The Colors were to look at Joseph Stalin as their leader.

Russia had been invaded, but it wasn't too bad for the population.

"God bless," I thought to myself, with every intention of bringing justice with my soul to Moscow, Russia.

"Am I your leader?" I would think to myself.
"Could I be the leader of this colony?"

The location had:

● Quarters
● Kitchen
● Dining hall
● Smelter
● Quarry
● Well
● Labor office
● Tree nursery
● Fruit garden
● Fire pit
● Church
● Grocery store
● Pay/Coin center

In my personal thoughts and inventory, I was conducting the carriage and horse kick when a sound came from the church halls. It was choir practice, and they were singing in unison a new song.

I knew this song from church; it was called *A Season of Praise.* They were singing:

"Oh, give praise!
The season has changed!
The day has dimmed!
To the darkness in the sky!
The light of our Faith!
A guidance on our paths to the Lord!
Oh, the labor! Oh, good work!
I will walk, I will pray!
Oh, how blessed is the house of my Lord!
For my faith to give way to the fruit!
I have faith!
I will live!
The work of my church!
And the prophet it has sent!

Grow, grow!
My good faith, it will grow!
God in heaven!

He has blessed all our homes!
All make way! All make way!
Christ shines its light from above!
It is here! It is here!
A blessing and a gift from above!
My feet have been washed in the vineyard of the Lord.
I give praise! I give praise!
Behold the work!
Of the angels!
It brings peace to my heart!
To know the season has changed!
I will rest in peace knowing our work will be done!"

It was nice to hear the songs of the congregation.

Across the street was the labor office, and I was hailed as a free person, able to attend a personal session and interview.

The base of the building was sturdy, and the wooden roof had a nice shape that enveloped the exterior with minimal adhesive or concrete. The chairs inside were all wooden, and the interview was not color-oriented—it was rather intense.

The questions were simple, although they carried another meaning. A serious tone was used, and I felt there was a threat—an Assyrian threat.

"Do you understand the task of our office?" asked the Austrian man behind a wooden desk with enough papers, ink, and pens to work efficiently in the Office of Labor.

"Yes," I responded.

"Are you present, intelligent, and one person?"

"Yes, sir. I am intelligent, and I am one person."

"Do you understand the Human One in nudity?" asked the Austrian man.

"That is a complicated question. I have not yet had a difficult time understanding the human body," I said.

"Do you have any behavioral issues?"

"No, sir."

"Do you understand our base of income?"

"I understand the work of the quarry."

"Will you labor?" he asked.

"I can labor to the best of my ability," I responded.

"How can you function?"

"Coffee and tobacco," I answered.

"Good," he said.

"You may leave now. I will call you or summon you if there is work available."

"Good! Thank you, sir."

I left the office.

I went to the door, turned the brass knob, and opened it. The air brushed against my face, my eyelashes—that was it. I looked down at the concrete, balmed and fresh.

I was excited to be part of the labor party. The politics were exhausting. The work in the quarry was a tax that had to be paid to ensure the longevity of our state in Russia.

It had been a long time since the famine in Russia. The House of Commons in the United Kingdom and the American labor party had much work to do on the mainland.

It was difficult to define the suffering—the famine, the pestilence. It had been present for a very long time. If I had to describe it, I would call it a putrid, degenerate plague.

The common man had no way to ensure he would survive—a demon monster with the ability to destroy all life in the old world. It had taken years, long years, decades, centuries of hard work to achieve a measure of certainty in the health and survival of the Russian Empire.

It seemed to have been under a curse—an ancient Egyptian magic dating back to the construction of the Great Pyramid and the demise of the great Oasis of the Nile River.

Things now had to be more sanitary when building homes. The common man had to wash his hands more often, disconnecting from the very fabric of Mother Nature.

"What an unholy circumcision," I muttered to myself.
"Is there any other way to overcome this situation?" I asked aloud.

"It's going to take more than being a doctor," I continued.
"It's going to take fire! Chemicals!"

I quieted down, not wanting to be too loud. The Whites and the Colors were still separated under the leadership of Lenin and Joseph Stalin. Although I was allowed to speak freely, Joseph Stalin was like a father to me.

I blinked and looked toward the impound platform, then turned to the backside of the billboard I had been reading. I steadied my footing, pressing into the cushion of my boots—boots I had afforded with some luck.

The text on the billboard read, in American for clarity, as Russian orders:

The New Bill
To Be Passed in the State of America in Mainland Russia

A person in the United States–American Russia would be admitted into function to use institutional resources in the livestock slaughter. The research of tissue, organs, and new measures would ensure the formula behind the new 'product.'

The placement of the product must fit the definition of **Church, Altar, Sacrifice**—regional. This action would require the 'product' to be accepted as an item, measured, and issued a note to circulate within our septic system if necessary, in order to lessen criminal 'enterprise.'

State and Federal Benefits:

- Healthcare
- Capital
- Beginning and End

To mark the admission and departure of **visitors into the United States and American Russia** for this benefit. **Organic.**

The second part would cover the **previous idea of income collection** in the **State of the United States and Russia.** A person in the United States and Russia...

It was a political bulletin. It caught my attention, and I felt the weight of depression sink into me—being a citizen of this new United States and American State in Russia.

As I stood there, absorbing the weight of the bulletin's words, I felt a deep unease settle over me. The world was shifting beneath my feet, the tectonic plates of history grinding together, reshaping the land I once thought I understood. This new United States and American Russia—what did it mean for people like me? What did it mean for the laborers, the workers in the quarry, the men and women who toiled day and night under the watchful eyes of leaders we barely knew?

Collateral Regret

By Kaveh Shirazi

"I apologize." In my own words, I pronounced the shame that had festered in my heart and now spilled into the ears of my daughter.

"A monster!" I gasped, my breath becoming shallow and frantic. *How could I?*

I am such an idiot!

I had spent weeks binging on coffee, indulging in marijuana and chocolates, drowning it all out.

"I fucking drowned it all out!"

"God, I'm fucking ruined!" I yelled.

"What is the matter with you, Dad? Are you okay?" she asked, concern laced in her voice.

Well, I thought to myself.

I had been offered $32,000 to launch a barrage of projectiles into Iran. I thought it was a joke.

Now, I am one of the most wanted people in the world.

I was cold and frightened.

The signature of a good surgeon, I mused quietly.

"Nothing, my love," I replied to my daughter.

Yet, fear gnawed at me. My livelihood was destroyed, lost to the sick imagery of war and the cold, soulless abyss of a city jail.

"What an idiot!" I scolded myself.

For years, I had stared at that advertisement, always assuming it was a joke.

Well, I'm going to click it! I had thought.

I'm going to kill innocent people today.

And I did.

Twenty-four hours after the transaction, I went to Starbucks for a caramel coffee. Then, the most disturbing sound filled my ears —

The drowning roar of missiles launching.

"BOOM!"

"BOOM!"

"POW!"

Explosion.

I thought it was just a joke.

Now, I am ruined.

I have ruined my life—
And possibly the life of my daughter.

What am I going to do?

As I sat in that dimly lit coffee shop, watching the foam dissipate from my untouched caramel coffee, my mind spiraled into the past. How had I let it come to this? I wasn’t a killer. I wasn’t a terrorist. I was just an average man, desperate and naive.

The job market had been unkind. My skills, once revered, had been rendered obsolete in a world moving faster than I could catch up. It had been months of overdue bills, of my daughter

looking at me with hopeful eyes, waiting for me to provide, and me failing over and over again.

Then I saw the ad.

"Looking for a quick payout? Willing to click a button to change the course of history? $32,000 guaranteed!"

It had to be a scam. It *had* to be.

But desperation makes a man blind. It makes him reckless. It makes him stupid.

So I clicked.

At first, it was harmless. A questionnaire—where I lived, my economic status, my beliefs. Then the terms and conditions, long and filled with legal jargon that I skimmed through, agreeing to whatever it said just to get to the end.

Then, the final button.

Launch.

It didn't say what I was launching. There were no details, no consequences laid out in fine print. Just a button. A simple, stupid button.

And I pressed it.

Now, the news played endlessly on every screen around me. Reports of the devastation. Cities in ruin. Innocent lives lost. And my name, soon to be plastered alongside war criminals, extremists, and radicals.

I gripped the table, nausea rolling in my stomach. My daughter sat across from me, still looking at me with innocent, trusting eyes. She didn’t know. She couldn’t know.

"Dad, are you sure you’re okay?" she asked again.

I forced a smile, but my hands trembled as I lifted the coffee cup to my lips.

"I’m fine, sweetheart," I lied.

Inside, I was already dead.

The weight of my actions sat heavy on my chest, suffocating me. Each breath felt like an admission of guilt. My hands, steady once, were now shaky, restless. I looked at my daughter again, her bright eyes so full of life, so free from the burdens I now carried. If she knew the truth, would she ever forgive me? Would she ever look at me the same way again?

I needed to fix this.

But how do you undo something of this magnitude? How do you atone for a crime so immense that it echoes through history? The thought of turning myself in crossed my mind. Maybe a confession would grant me some sliver of peace. Maybe the world needed to know that I wasn’t some faceless villain hiding behind a screen—I was just a man who made a terrible, irreversible mistake.

But then, what would happen to her?

If I disappeared into a prison cell, who would take care of her? Who would protect her from the world, from the consequences of my actions? She didn’t deserve this. I had to find another way.

I started researching, scouring the dark corners of the internet for anything—ways to disappear, ways to erase digital footprints, ways to escape the fate I had sealed for myself. Every article, every post felt futile. The reach of those in power was infinite. There was nowhere to run.

Paranoia began to settle in. Every time I stepped outside, I felt watched. Every police siren made my heart lurch in my chest. The news reports began hinting at their search narrowing. The

government was tracking down those responsible. It was only a matter of time.

I needed to leave.

I pulled my daughter aside one evening, forcing a reassuring smile onto my face.

"We’re going on a trip," I told her.

"A trip? Where?"

"Somewhere new. An adventure. Just you and me."

She grinned, oblivious to the storm raging inside me. "Like a vacation?"

I nodded, though this was no vacation. This was survival.

I packed what little we had, withdrew the remaining money from my account, and left behind the life we knew. We moved from city to city, never staying in one place for too long. I changed my name, grew out my beard, dyed my hair. Every step forward was a desperate attempt to stay one step ahead of the consequences chasing me.

But I couldn’t run forever.

One night, as we sat in a motel room, the weight of it all came crashing down. I looked at my daughter, sleeping soundly, unaware of the chaos surrounding us. I had stolen her innocence. I had taken away her chance at a normal life.

Tears burned my eyes.

"I’m sorry," I whispered, though she couldn’t hear me. "I’m so sorry."

And as the red and blue lights flashed outside our window, as the sound of boots echoed down the hallway, I knew—

It was over.

I had sealed my fate the moment I clicked that button.

I was frightened, and so it came naturally to me to rise up out of my seat and reach for the telephone. My hands trembled as I dialed the familiar number, my breath shallow and uneven. My mind raced with fear, my heart pounding in my chest as the call connected.

"Hello," I said into the receiver, my voice barely above a whisper.

"Hi," responded the comforting but concerned voice of my grandmother.

"I need you here right away!" I pleaded, desperation clawing at my throat. "I need you to take Dkaumi! I need you to take her now!"

I turned on the television, and the breaking news headline flashed across the screen in bold, glaring letters: **NUCLEAR DISASTER IN IRAN.**

My stomach twisted into knots as I watched the horrifying footage. The screen showed chaos—billowing clouds of fire and smoke consuming the Iranian airport. People were screaming, running for shelter, their faces contorted with terror. The earth shook beneath them as explosions ripped through the air.

"Blast!" "Boom!" "Pow!"

The sounds of destruction echoed in my ears as though I were right there, trapped in the inferno. My knees buckled, and I gripped the arm of the couch to steady myself. A suffocating wave of sorrow and guilt washed over me, heavier than anything I had ever known. Why did I feel this way? Was it because I was safe while so many others suffered? Because I knew that in some way, our world had changed forever? The weight of lamentation exceeded my natural senses, pressing down on my soul like an unbearable burden.

"Ahhhhhhh!" "Ahhhhhhh!" "Ahhhhhhh!" I screamed, my voice raw with agony, but there was no one to hear me. No one to stop the madness unfolding before my eyes.

Just then, a car pulled up into the driveway. I peered through the window with tear-blurred vision. My sister, Klujin Nevirted, stepped out. Her face was pale, her eyes wide with urgency. She had seen the reports on television and had come immediately.

"I’m ready to take Dkaumi to a safe place," she said firmly.

There was no time to hesitate. My daughter, my precious little girl, needed to be as far away from danger as possible. My heart clenched as I watched her gather her things, her innocent eyes filled with confusion and fear. She didn’t fully understand what was happening, but she knew something was wrong.

She climbed into the car, and my sister gave me a reassuring nod before they drove away. I stood motionless in the doorway, watching until their tail lights disappeared down the street. Then, I turned back into the house, feeling hollow and lost.

The silence engulfed me. My legs gave out, and I collapsed onto the floor, my body wracked with sobs.

"Ahhhrghspm mmmbnbm huuugh!," I choked on my cries, rocking back and forth as grief overtook me.

"What am I going to do?" I whispered to no one, the question hanging in the air, unanswered, as the world outside burned in chaos.

Hours passed, but time felt meaningless. I sat in the dim glow of the television, watching the destruction unfold on repeat. My mind was numb, my body drained. And yet, somewhere deep inside, a flicker of determination ignited. I couldn't change what had happened, but I could still act. I wiped my tears, took a deep breath, and stood up. It was time to face whatever came next.

When Cats Fly and Dogs Snooze

By Ronald McDonald

I could not stop laughing! The funniest thing had just occurred—something so absurd that I wasn't sure anyone would believe me. There I was, standing in the front yard of the small home I was living in, enjoying the crisp afternoon breeze, when out of nowhere, a dog came flying through the air like it had just been shot from a circus cannon!

And right behind him? A cat.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! What the heck?" I exclaimed, wiping tears from my eyes as the absurd scene unfolded before me.

'Thud!' The dog landed with a hearty plop on the grass, skidding a little before coming to a lazy stop.

'Screech!' The cat followed shortly after, hitting the ground in a most undignified fashion, claws out and fur flying, as if trying to brake midair.

Now, these weren't just any ordinary dog and cat. These two had been at each other's throats for as long as I could remember. Barking, yowling, chasing, scratching—you name it. Day after day, they created the loudest ruckus, and today, it seemed, someone had finally had enough.

I couldn't help but feel like I was witnessing justice in its most comical form. The cat, a scraggly black-and-white creature with a perpetual look of bad luck and malnutrition, pawed at the gravel, still dazed from its unexpected flight. It had been scratching and

sneaking around the house all morning, looking for weak spots to squeeze through and shady areas to hide in.

The dog, a brown mutt with floppy ears and a sleepy expression, didn't even bother to get up. He just lay there on his side, breathing heavily, as though this sort of thing happened to him all the time.

"I told you two to be quiet!" came a loud voice from the porch. The homeowner, a wiry old man with a face like a weathered prune, came stomping out of the house, broomstick in hand. He looked furious.

Without missing a beat, he marched right up to the dog and gave him a gentle whack on the rear. "Wake up, you lazy mutt!" he shouted. The dog let out a soft grunt but didn't move. He was either too tired or too indifferent to care.

Next, the man turned his attention to the cat, who had started pawing at the rocks as if trying to dig an escape tunnel.

"And you—I oughta put you on a rocket next time!" he growled, waving the broomstick menacingly. The cat hissed and bolted, sprinting halfway across the yard before stopping to glare at him from a safe distance.

I couldn't stop laughing. "How did they fly that far?" I finally managed to ask, my voice shaking with laughter.

The old man leaned on his broomstick and gave me a crooked grin. "I threw the cat," he said matter-of-factly, as though launching felines was a perfectly normal afternoon activity.

"The dog," he added with a wink, "I used a giant slingshot for."

I stared at him, dumbfounded. "A slingshot?"

He nodded proudly. "Built it myself. Tired of their noise. If you see them hanging around again, don't let 'em come back!"

"Okay," I said, still chuckling.

The old man gave a satisfied nod, then turned on his heel and went back inside, leaving me alone with the dog and cat. I glanced at the pair, who were now sitting side by side as though nothing had happened. The cat licked its paw nonchalantly, while the dog let out a big yawn and stretched lazily.

“You two are something else,” I muttered, shaking my head.

As the minutes passed, I couldn’t help but replay the scene in my head over and over again. The sight of that dog soaring through the air, his ears flapping like wings, followed by that scrappy little cat—it was the stuff of cartoons, not real life! Yet it had happened, right here in front of me.

Just then, the cat let out a soft meow and padded over to me, rubbing against my leg as though asking for forgiveness. The dog followed, wagging his tail and giving me a sheepish look. It was hard to stay mad at them, even after all the noise and chaos they’d caused.

“Alright, alright,” I said, giving them each a pat on the head. “But you’d better behave, or next time, I might be the one with the slingshot.”

They seemed to understand, because for the rest of the afternoon, they stayed quiet as mice. The cat curled up on the porch, purring softly, while the dog dozed off in the shade. Peace had finally been restored—at least for now.

Later that evening, as the sun dipped below the horizon and the sky turned a deep shade of purple, I sat on the porch and watched the world settle down for the night. The old man’s house was quiet, and the yard was peaceful. It was hard to believe that just a few hours earlier, it had been the scene of such ridiculous chaos.

As I sat there, I found myself thinking about the strange little moments that make life interesting. Sometimes, it’s the unexpected things—like flying dogs and grumpy old men with slingshots—that bring the most joy.

And sometimes, it’s the simple things—like a quiet evening and two unlikely friends napping side by side—that remind you that, no matter how crazy life gets, there’s always room for a little bit of peace.

With a smile on my face and a heart full of laughter, I leaned back in my chair and closed my eyes, grateful for the madness and the magic of the day.

Because, in the end, it’s moments like these that make life worth living.

The Pet Store

By Aputsiaq Kleist

Inside a pet store, a new routine was taking shape. It was all about the cats—cats that were going to be the rage of the decade.

“Cats! Everything about cats!” The store’s new slogan was plastered on signs throughout the shop.

The store owner, a woman from Scandinavia, was busy organizing the lizards and spiders. She carefully placed them into boxes for transport, their tiny claws scratching against the plastic walls. The store’s linoleum tiles gleamed under the bright fluorescent lights, reflecting the meticulous order she maintained.

The doors of the pet store were framed with glass and a steel aluminum alloy, contrasting with the brick and clay exterior. They whispered open with a soft ‘swish.’

“Meow!” cried a cat.

A man entered, balancing a box in his arms. He was a general attendant at the store, tasked with the care of its many

creatures. Inside the box were two kittens, their small bodies pressed against each other for warmth.

“Meow!” cried the other, his tiny paws scratching at the box’s edge.

The store owner turned, momentarily distracted from her work. “Oh, my God!” she exclaimed, rushing over.

“How are you?” the man asked, setting the box down gently.

“Meow!” replied the grey kitten, blinking up at the towering humans.

‘I’m good,’ the kitten thought, nudging its sibling.

The two were a striking pair—one was a smoky grey, the other black and white with a small pink nose. Their fur was soft, and their eyes gleamed with curiosity.

“Are they from around here?” the woman asked, peering into the box.

“No, they’re new to the store,” the man replied, carefully lifting them out.

“I have so much to do,” she sighed, gesturing across the store. It stretched nearly an eighth of a mile, filled with enclosures for the store’s many animals.

The man nodded, but his attention was on the kittens. He had always had a soft spot for cats—the way they moved, the way they spoke without words. These two were already communicating, their purring and tiny meows forming an unspoken conversation.

“I like to go outside,” said the grey kitten, its ears twitching as it took in the unfamiliar surroundings.

“Is there any food?” asked the black and white kitten, its stomach giving a small rumble.

The man smiled as if he understood. There was something special about these two.

“You’ll get food soon,” he assured them, scratching the grey kitten behind the ears. It leaned into his touch, purring loudly.

The store owner, already moving on to her next task, carried the kittens to a newly prepared enclosure. It was built to match the modern aesthetic of the store, spacious and clean. She set them inside gently.

The kittens immediately began exploring, their tiny tails flicking in excitement.

“This place smells strange,” murmured the grey kitten.

“Everything smells strange to you,” teased the black and white one, batting at its sibling playfully.

They turned their heads as the man crouched by their pen, watching them with warm eyes.

“Hey there,” he said softly. “You two are something special, aren’t you?”

The kittens padded toward him, pressing their small bodies against the bars.

“I like him,” the grey one decided, nudging its nose against the man’s outstretched finger.

“He brought us here. That means he’s good,” the black and white one agreed, rubbing against the bars.

The man chuckled. “You two are going to make someone very happy.”

For the next few days, the kittens grew used to the store. They played with each other, wrestled over toy mice, and stretched out under the warm store lights. They watched the customers come and go, their tiny ears perking up whenever the man came near.

He was their favorite. He always made sure they had enough food, and he always stopped to pet them before moving on with his duties.

One evening, as the store was closing, the man lingered by their pen. The kittens curled up together, blinking sleepily at him.

“I kind of don’t want to sell you,” he admitted, running a gentle hand over their fur. “You belong with someone who really loves you.”

The grey kitten purred. “You could take us home.”

The black and white kitten yawned. “That sounds nice.”

The man sighed, as if he wished for the same thing. He gave them one last scratch behind the ears before standing up.

As he turned to leave, the kittens curled into each other, their tails wrapped together. They knew, deep down, that no matter what happened, they had already found their first home—in the heart of the man who brought them in.

Liz

by Jonathan Olvera

Liz was in the bathroom of a nightclub, her heart pounding with excitement and anxiety. She wanted to look good for all the other women in the club that night.

The mirror was extra reflective, revealing the stretch marks on her skin and the stains on her clothes. Liz splashed some water on her face, pulled on her hair, twisted it, and set it over her left shoulder. She didn’t have much hair—just about nine inches of a blonde, frizzy, stylish mess.

Liz was a lesbian, and she wanted to party.

The music suddenly shifted from salsa to a more electronic, fast-paced beat.

Some meth would have been alright.

Luckily, she didn’t have to go far. In the bathroom, a woman was snorting meth off a glass mirror. Liz knocked on the door and pulled out five dollars.

"Hi, can I party with you?" Liz asked.

"Sure."

The woman took a sealed bag from under her dress and poured out a small mound of meth.

Liz’s excitement grew. She snorted the meth, and the effect was immediate.

Liz was flying. Liz was on ice.

She reached into her pocket, feeling the mascara brush and lipstick inside. She toyed with them for a moment before deciding, Why not?

"Thank you! That was alright!" she said, grinning. "I feel awesome!"

"I’ll be around!"

She shut the door of the bathroom stall and headed for the main floor, ready to party the night away—looking different.

Boom! Boom! Boom!
The music was loud, and it became faster.

Zip! Zap! Zonk!

It was an electronic dance beat. The darkness of the scene was illuminated by a cloud of fog or smoke blowing across the room.

It smelled like tobacco, hot sugar steaming, and food.

“Whoo! Yeah!” hollered Liz. She was ready to have a good time.

There were so many women dancing, shaking their hips, and showing their breasts off to the men.

Liz was sure she could get lucky!

“What’s up?” asked a blonde woman wearing a pink shirt and athletic bottoms.

“Are you trying to get lucky?” she asked.

The blonde had a yellowish tint to her hair that matched something special about her vibe. She had small but round, noticeable breasts—like jumbo mandarins.

“What?” asked Liz. She couldn’t believe she was getting lucky so soon in the club that night.

“Do you want a man?” asked the blonde.

“No!” replied Liz.

“What are you, gay or something?” the blonde asked.

“I am a lesbian!” Liz shouted over the music.

Boom! Boom! Boom!
Tit! Tit! Tit!

The music was loud.

“I’m not gay!” the blonde replied.

“I like porn, though! I know what you need,” she said.

“My name is Dariel—like a boy.”

“Hi, Dariel! I just snorted some meth. I like porn too!” said Liz.

“Wow, that’s extreme! I just drink and like caffeine.”

“What does that do?” Dariel asked.

The dark, smoky scene shifted as lights and lasers lit up the space.

“I’m not sure,” yelled Liz.

“Let’s find out!” said Dariel.

“I have a room at the hotel down the street,” Dariel said.

“Let’s go then,” Liz replied.

The door was twenty yards from the center of the warehouse club, and they started toward it. It took four to six minutes of

saying goodbye to everyone and making preparations to leave the building and head into the street.

The air was moist, and the night was crisp and cold. Winter was blowing through the city.

The road outside stretched a nice distance in both directions—east and west. The concrete path was simple to follow east, where the cracks and crevices between blocks were lined with grass, leading through a neighborhood of two-story houses and up to a five-story hotel.

“Wow, that’s nice,” said Liz.

“I know!” agreed Dariel. “I got it for myself to spend the night. I wasn’t planning on doing anything, but then I ran into you, and you’re high on meth—so now we can go together,” she expressed.

Liz’s heart was racing now. The thought of being in a hotel room with Dariel—nude, high, intoxicated, and under the influence—was thrilling. The anticipation was nearly unbearable.

“Whooo!” exclaimed Liz.

“Are you that excited?” asked Dariel.

“Yes! That club was live!”

Ten minutes of walking and making sure there would be cigarettes. (Dariel had a pack of cigarettes, and Liz had a bag of tobacco and rolling papers.)

The five-story building was tan and gray with signs of wear. A sign above the door read HOTEL, and a clerk stood at the front desk, ready to assist customers.

Together, they made quite a scene—two blondes, one with black eyes like Liz and the other with yellow-tinged whites—checking into a hotel together, ready to be together.

“What’s up, ladies? How can I help you?” asked the yellow-haired, green-eyed clerk.

“I’m here to check in,” said Dariel.

“What room?”

“Room 22,” Dariel replied.

“Does your friend have an ID?”

“Yes,” said Liz.

She reached into her underwear, pulled out an ID, placed it on the counter, and framed it with her fingers for the clerk to see.

“I can see your name and age. It checks out,” said the clerk.

“Alright! Let’s go!” exclaimed Dariel.

The night was coming to an end as they passed from the lobby into the next passageway—a decorative square that led into the body of the hotel.

Room 22 was down the hallway, in the corner of the building, and up two flights of stairs.

Boom, Boom, Boom! said Liz.

“Hahaha! The music was awesome!” replied Dariel.

“Look!” Dariel pointed.

“Room 22! Let’s go inside and get nude!”

Liz agreed.

Dariel had the key tucked into her bra. The door opened, and the two immediately started undressing, throwing their clothes in decorative places.

Liz was nude, and so was Dariel.

“You’re going to have fun, aren’t you?” exclaimed Dariel with a mischievous grin.

“I like sex on meth!” Liz admitted, laughing.

“I’m not on meth, but I know you are. I can take care of you,” Dariel teased, running a finger down Liz’s arm.

Dariel suddenly grabbed two pillows from the bed and tossed one at Liz.

“First game—pillow fight!” she announced, striking a playful stance.

Liz caught the pillow and smirked. “Oh, you’re on!”

Feathers flew as they swung at each other, giggling, stumbling, and falling onto the bed in a tangle of limbs.

“Alright, round two!” Dariel gasped between laughs. She reached into the bedside drawer and pulled out a deck of cards.

“Strip poker?” Liz asked.

Dariel raised an eyebrow. “We’re already naked.”

“Then let’s make it interesting. Loser gets tickled!” Liz challenged.

The night was just beginning, filled with laughter, teasing, and a series of ridiculous, improvised games that neither of them would forget.

Tonight wasn’t just about getting lucky—it was about being wild and free.

The next scene was more interesting when Dariel said to Liz, I have something in the drawer that I want to show you. And Liz sat back down on the bed in between the pillows and Dariel opened a drawer and the dress that the hotel had provided. Daria said. I have a dildo and it is very huge. Would you like to enthuse yourself with my company? Liz said. Yes, of course, that would be awesome. And together they began to kiss.

The next scene was more interesting when Dariel said to Liz, I have something in the drawer that I want to show you. And Liz sat back down on the bed in between the pillows and Dariel opened a drawer and the dress that the hotel had provided. Dariel said. "I have a dildo and it is very huge. Would you like to enthuse yourself with my company?" Liz said. "Yes! Of course, that would be awesome!" And together they began to kiss.

And so that she said, "Liz, I'm just kidding with you, but I'm going to snap your face with this dildo and reinsert it into your crotch. Would you like to be entertained with me?" Said Dariel. Liz said "Yes Dariel!, it would be the most pleasant for you to do this while I am nude on the bed." And they did so and so forth and becoming that the friction between both of them had excited this in two were almost like a scene of two Indians being in touch

with each other and the nature of this sex it was exciting that they both were almost ready to burst and groan with satisfaction.

This was so loud the neighbors at the hotel could hear that both of them were kissing and naked and we're taking turns jumping on each other and the pillows and the blankets were strewed about loudly so that the neighbors began to knock "Tick, tick, tock!" "Hey, could you Two keep it down?" It was so loud that Dariel and Liz were having a party and gone off the club drugs that they had taken. They were even more excited by this knock and they let out a groan in unison and Daria answered and said "Yes neighbor! I hear you! I do apologize that we are fornicating and I will keep it down!!!"

And Liz said "Hush!" "Did you tell them that we are fornicating? This is new to me!" And so Daria apologized, re inserted the dildo and Liz took a more dominant pose and she did attain a fruitful reaction out to Liz.

This was much the satisfaction of their wet pussy that they both went to sleep satisfied and this was the end of the encounter at Dariel and Liz had after the club when they did Make Love to each other like 2 virgin lesbians in the city at a hotel in a desolate town in the middle of America. Liz checked out of the hotel and Dariel stayed in the hotel. She grabbed her things, put her clothes on and walked home like it was the first time.

Zippy Zany’s Clown Catastrophe

By Zippy Zany

I painted my face as I started my day in front of a mirror, White embalmed pigment and red paint for my lips.
"Hey, Hey. Hey!"
"How are you!" I repeated.
I am a clown.
'Honky, Honkey, Honk.' I thought to myself.
How could I possibly fit a better image in my profession?
'By doing the ridiculous.'
"Blllphhhhfp!" I blew a raspberry to the mirror and I thought. 'I ought to do that some more.
'Next!' I thought.
'I will color my hair.'
Ready to begin my act of public disagreement and silly behavior.
I readied myself to walk out the door.
I put on my oversized shoes and I locked my house and I began my way to the store.
I walked in and I quickly headed to the hair aisle and I bought some green and yellow hair dye.
It was perfect for my character.

"How are you today sir?" The cashier asked.
"Zantasical and fantastical! Young man!"
"Good to know." Said the young man.
I grabbed my things and the change.
"Ha Ha Ha HA Ha!" I started laughing outside under the portico of the large store structure.
I had been so complicated in my search for products and I even entertained a stranger to my mode of preparation for my Clown occupation.
How hilarious!
I returned home to dye the left and right side of my hair a green and yellow color.
to make jokes and prepare my costume it was a very funny and entertaining week for me.

A Scary Story!

By Jonathan Olvera

I have stories to tell you. Stories that will haunt your dreams and chill your bones.

Some are mere whispers of fear, and others… others will leave you breathless.

We, as men, must be brave, must walk through this world with our eyes wide open, unafraid. But let me tell you—ghosts, demons, they choose who will be their company.

In this life, and in the dark corners of our existence, we will encounter many things—things that claw at the edges of your soul. Ghosts. Poltergeists. Demons. Kings. Fairies. Spirits who roam the earth, leaders of our people, their existence tethered to the darkness.

They are chosen to guide us, to pull us from the torturous grasp of fear, to test our resolve.

To be afraid of the dark is to surrender.

And those who surrender… are lost.

Young man, listen closely: Nature is far more than what you see with your eyes. Nature includes us all, men and demons, shadows and light. And there is nothing more terrifying than the truth of our reality.

There are curses, hexes, spirits beyond our comprehension. And the world? It is far more than you could ever imagine. A cruel, terrifying cycle of life and death.

I warn you.

Prepare yourself.

For the physical property of eternity? It’s real. It exists. And it will find you.

What’s more frightening—knowing what comes tomorrow, or knowing the man you are?

This is my life, and it is now yours too.

I can begin now, for I’ve seen it. I’ve witnessed the terrible things that walk among us.

Days pass, yet time is still. A searing, barren exile in the Southwest desert. A place formed billions of years ago, but still

holding the souls of the lost—the men, the animals, the very stars and suns that have fallen.

Our reality, forged in endless battles.

Titans rise. The sands of time swirl.

The wrath of God and the devil themselves, fighting to consume all existence.

The battle of creation, and the birth of death.

To capture the relics—our darkness, our doom.

They whisper questions to men.

They ask me, “What is this world?”

Terrifying storms follow me, storming through the fabric of my soul.

Can you escape it?

Women, men, and children, gathered in fear.

We must work for the king, we must labor for ourselves, to survive.

But is it right for me to exist here? Is this a trick of the devil?

I see ghosts every day, and I speak their names in silence.

Beasts, men, demons. Kings in the shadows, their presence a constant reminder of what lies beneath.

Giant lizards, creatures of the earth’s deepest nightmares.
Should I be afraid?

I cannot.

I must worship my God.

To exist is my curse, my reality.

Would it be easier for me to say, "I am scared"? Yes.

Would it be easier to turn on the lights, to run and hide from the shadows that whisper at my door? Yes.

But the Legion of Shadows needs a leader.

It needs a leader who can see in the dark.

Can you see the dark? Can you withstand it?

I ask you: Have no fear.

I ask you to withstand this possession, to confront it.

How terrifying, how terrifying it is to say: “Be gone, demon.”

I can tell you, when no one else is here, when the house is still and the silence is thick, the devil knocks.

He knocks, and he asks for a blessing.

He asks to be seen by God, to be heard by the divine.

And the ghosts of men—they visit me too, in the dead of night. They ask for baptism, for salvation.

In the heat of this battle, I say, “Amen.”

Let them be seen by God, let them be heard by His council.

What is terrifying, I ask you?

Is it to help the spirits you and I both know? The ones who speak in whispers, their voices soft as a deathly breeze?

The terrible nature of sacrifice.

Praise, my friends. Praise.

I can tell you this: I was frightened. A spirit visited me one night, in my temple, and it was not a visitor you would wish to meet.

Damnation. Suffering. Sadness. A presence of despair that soaked into my bones.

But no…

I’ve been frightened before. But not anymore. I give blessings to them now, to the spirits who walk among us.

I give blessings to you, reader.

This world, this home we live in—Earth—is terrifying, but it is where we must stay.

Stay in school. Go to church. Exercise. Be brave. Listen to your parents, so that no harm may come to you.

And above all, do not fear what you cannot see

A Season of Praise!

by: Jonathan Olvera

Oh give praise!
The season has changed!

The day has dimmed!
To the darkness in the sky!
The light of our Faith!
A guidance on our paths to the Lord!
Oh the labor! Oh good works!
I will walk, I will pray!
Oh! how blessed is the house of my Lord!
For my faith to give way to the fruit!
I have faith!
I will live!
The work of my church!
And the prophet it has sent!

Grow grow!
My good faith will grow!
God in heaven!
He has blessed all our homes!
All make way! All Make Way!
The christ shines it's light from above!
It is here! It is here!
A blessing and a gift from above!
My feet have been washed in the vineyard of the Lord.
I give praise! I give praise!
Be hold the work!
Of the angels!
It brings peace to my heart!
To know the season has changed!
I will rest in peace that our work will be done!
Amen.

A Season of Change!

By Jonathan Olvera

Behold above, the times have changed!
The seasons will now give shade!
All the days of my time, in our faith, in the goodness of Our Lord!
We are strong!
All the angels in the sky!
They will tell the Throne of our God!
Our faith did not change!
In Our church!
Our hand did this work!
All the Heat!
All the darkness!
Oh! the church will always shine!
We give favors!
For our young!
We lend ears to the old!
All the days on the head of our church!
Our good Lord he always did count!
We rejoice!
We sing praise!
In our church we will never lose faith!

Amen.

Sunlight Over Stone: A Testament from the Worksite of God

by Jonathan Olvera

In the shadow of empires and the clamor of politics, I have lived as a quiet observer—neither ruler nor rebel, but a man with ink-stained fingers and a gaze turned toward the heavens. I was born not to conquer nations, but to bear witness to the movements of light, to map the patterns of divine rhythm carved across the skies and beneath the dust. Where others see only stone and structure, I see parables. Where others labor for coin, I labor for meaning. Mine is a life devoted to interpreting the sacred geometry of creation—reading signs in the heavens, listening for echoes of justice, and tracing the fingerprints of God in a world seduced by idols. I seek not merely work, but consecrated purpose. Not power, but truth. And so, I begin.

"Hello!"

"How are you?"

The person directly across the dusty Roman path—a noble messenger dressed in crimson trim—did not care to acknowledge me. A greeting offered in the warmth of dawn, dismissed like dust in the wind.

“How rude,” I muttered under my breath, low enough not to draw attention.

But in these days—indeed, in these years—who could be bothered by discourtesy or passing words? The empire surged with murmurs, temples clanged with politics, and men bowed to gods of brass and appetite.

I looked up. The giant, glimmering sun spun gently upon its axis. My heart lifted. I remembered: this little pebble we call earth is not alone. Above this land, above the Seven Hills, there is another earth, a higher realm.

“Awesome!” I said to myself, nearly laughing.

I was eager. Another day of observation. Another moment to record the turning heavens, the signs, and the cycles. My work was not for Caesar but for creation. I calculated, I mapped, I waited.

“This will help me,” I said aloud. “Now is the time to begin what is necessary—to collect resource and interpret the rhythms of God’s design.”

My joy was found in labor, in the light of the most truthful, most righteous ruler: the one above all. The sun would rise, and it would fall. The moon would echo its procession. Such was the law.

And yet, how often we live in the absence of God while standing squarely inside His creation. Left to observe and name what we’ve forgotten to revere.

“But I suppose I have plenty to do,” I shrugged.

What a wonderful year, to live beneath the sun with a fair ruler—kind, merciful, obedient to law. For it is we who make him so, and thus I recognize him. But I recognize something greater.

“Politics!” I said aloud, more forcefully this time.

Fifty paces ahead, a small crowd had formed. A herald stood with scroll in hand, announcing decrees from a newly appointed judge—a man praised for his Roman heritage but baptized in the Nephite fire. They were building something.

“Greetings to you all,” I said, joining the assembly.

“This work is good. It will last,” I muttered. “It does suffice, unlike the rants and advertisements that plague our avenues.”

Carriages wheeled past. Bushels of wheat exchanged for stones and coins. Commerce churned to uphold the constitution of our local city-state. I watched, calculating. There was justice, but only for some. Labor, but only for the desperate.

In the distance stood three schools—one for water, one for architecture, one for the gathering of resources.

“I need this contract!” I shouted. “Let me be heard!”

Who would listen? Who would honor a simple man’s errand?

> “In our time, creation has changed many times. God is all-powerful, and the laws of creation are His making. Violence and suffering are real.”

This voice. I heard it. Not from the herald, but from somewhere deeper—from above or within, I could not tell.

“False idols are worshipped,” it said. “And those who do so will perish in their sin.”

I stepped aside from the crowd and knelt in the alley of the aqueduct. The water hummed like ancient music. My mind opened.

The heavens echoed with the greatness of creation. Gravity, from the smallest grain to the highest sphere, governed all. Technology reached for answers, but many used it to deny truth. The world mocked righteousness.

I did not. I could not. I praised the Creator.

> “Behold, the King!”

My eyes burned with light. I saw fire—not of war, but of judgment. The lake that devours the wicked. The scales tipped not by gold but by righteousness.

> “To live in sin—lying, stealing, fornicating—is emptiness. Life without His presence is void.”

Was this madness? Or revelation?

I remembered the testimony of the converted Roman—years from now, yet already echoing in my chest. The year was 2024. The land split in two. The Nephites, the Romans. War by other names. Politics. Scarcity. Grain for swords, faith for shelter.

The moon rose, and the sons of the servants of God walked by its light. They studied the Scriptures, prayed, gave thanks for the catch, the provision, the simple meal.

> “Through the works of man, the end of the scenery comes. Yet by faith, we are sewn to a new season.”

I saw them: men in the fields, women in the courts, judges appointed not for lineage but for justice. Roman judges turned prophets. Nephite warriors turned servants.

The year was 2025.

> “The judge ruled over both lands.”

He fought with methodical justice—earned through quarry labor and consecrated toil. Beneath the heat, the battle raged. But some remained true.

So too did I.

I returned to my bench in the agora. My scrolls fluttered in the wind.

“We should work,” I whispered. “We should continue in our purpose.”

The language of offense had become an art. Men debated ownership, markets, sickness, sacrifice. Yet the heavens remained unchanged. The sun rose. The stars spun.

Never dig too deep for a simple truth: we are here.

I looked to the Temple of Apollo. Then past it. Toward the invisible temple—the House of the Lord, which no hand could build.

“Hear me in my prayer, O Lord, in this battle. Hear me in this heat.”

The stone under my feet warmed from below. The stars above shimmered like diamonds.

A trumpet sounded.

A messenger ran through the square: “The court has ruled! The contracts are fulfilled! All laborers—report to the fields!”

And so I rose, no longer just a plebian. I was a witness. A laborer. A prophet beneath the sun.

My hands bore the dust of Rome. My chest carried the scrolls of the Lord.

Sunlight over stone. God over Caesar. Amen.

Let it be remembered, then, that in an age of fire and empire, a man stood quietly beneath the sun and chose reverence over rage. I was not great by birth, nor powerful in name, yet I bore testimony in dust and daylight. I saw the patterns unfold, the judgment pass, the mercy rise like dawn. And though my hands are weathered and my scrolls worn thin, my spirit is firm. For I have labored not in vain but in light. The sun still spins. The King still reigns. Let those with ears to hear arise from their stones and take up the work of heaven. The court has ruled. The fields await.

Amen.

Desert Notes and Painted Dreams

By Jonathan Olvera

Dedication

To my Grandfather Charles —
who is always there, steady as the earth beneath my feet, and true as the stars above the desert.

This story is a reflection of my creative journey — an afternoon where music and painting swirled together like colors on a palette. Inspired by Van Gogh's emotion-rich brushstrokes and the haunting resonance of desert air, I set out to capture the spirit of the land I call home. What began as a thought — a fleeting dream — turned into something real. In this story, I invite you to walk with me through sun, sound, and swirling vision, where imagination and nature sing the same song.

Floating and Striking Familiar Chords

"One day!" I think to myself, fists clenched with resolve and eyes fixed on the sun-drenched distance.
"One day, I will put this together!"

The breeze hums low through the canyon, like the pluck of a loose guitar string. It's more than wind — it's music. Not just any music, but something I can feel in my bones. I sit on a smooth rock out in the desert, a place I've come to a thousand times. Behind me, a canvas leans against a weathered pack. Beside it, a beaten-up acoustic guitar waits like a loyal dog.

I think about chords — scratched metal strings against callused fingertips — and how they vibrate with the music of my imagination. The sounds rise like smoke, invisible but filling the air with something powerful.

It's something that entertains me.
No — it sustains me.

"Awesome," I say aloud, smiling at no one but the sky. The clouds swirl like oil paint in a glass of water. I can almost see Van Gogh brushing stars into the sky, or painting fields of golden wheat with a sun that screams color.

"Although now," I say, stretching my fingers, "I must think of what I can do now for this sake."

I close my eyes and let the wind whisper answers.

Colors, I think.
Green. Blue. Black. Red. Brown.

"Put a canvas in front of me and I will paint it!" I exclaim, standing with a rush of passion. My voice echoes against a nearby rock wall, startling a hawk into flight. It circles above, watching me.

I set the canvas down against a small cairn of stones, brush in hand. My fingers still hum from earlier chords played beneath a mesquite tree. My style is raw — it isn't perfect. But neither is this land, and that's what makes it beautiful.

The first stroke is a soft green — for the cactus spines and the life hidden beneath hard skin. Then blue — the kind you see at the edge of the sky just before the stars appear. I splash on red with a sudden intensity, like the memory of a song that strikes your chest unexpectedly. Brown for the earth, and black for the shadows that make the light mean something.

"There's nothing that can stop my imagination," I whisper, "when I'm out in the desert, looking at my friends, my home, the cactus, and the open sky."

I take a step back and squint at the painting. It's not Van Gogh's "Starry Night." It's not perfect. But it's mine.

Each brushstroke echoes the chords I played. E minor becomes a horizon. A major forms the curl of a Joshua tree. G stands tall like a cactus against a yellow wash of sun. I'm not just painting with paint — I'm painting with sound. With memory.

As the sun dips behind a distant ridge, the desert is dipped in gold. Long shadows stretch across the ground like stories waiting to be told. I sit again, guitar in hand, letting the painting dry in the warmth of the evening. I strum lightly, chasing the chords that still linger in the air.

A melody begins — slow, thoughtful. Like a walk across familiar sand. Then it quickens. I can feel the brush in my hand again, painting not with strokes but with notes. Each sound brings a color to life in my mind. A Van Gogh in motion, twirling with paint and rhythm.

The desert joins in. Cicadas sing in harmony. A distant coyote adds texture, wild and free. My fingers move faster now — the music no longer mine, but something ancient flowing through me.

I laugh suddenly, delighted by it all.
"What an amazing life!" I say, truly satisfied.

And I mean it.

And so, beneath the gem-studded sky of Arizona, Jonathan continues to shape something quietly extraordinary — a blend of color, sound, and soul that only he can create. It's a gift born of desert winds and starlit chords, one no one else can give, because it comes from the heart of a dreamer who sees the world not just as it is, but as it could be.

Tea, Music, and Dissonance: Life with Ludwig van Beethoven

by Jonathan Olvera

"In the quiet hum of the evening, where music and thought weave together like threads of a forgotten tapestry, I find my purpose not in the applause of the world, but in the delicate silence between each note, each breath, where the true symphony of life begins."

The morning always began the same way—filled with the comforting aroma of freshly brewed coffee and the steady hiss of a steaming kettle. It was a simple rhythm, one that filled the space with warmth and promise. The house, still a little unfamiliar to those who had recently moved in, seemed to echo with the potential of what was to come. The residents of this place had only just settled in, but their names already whispered through the halls like a soft melody.

Ludwig van Beethoven, a figure so iconic it felt surreal to share air with him, stood at the heart of it all. With him were small, diligent helpers—assistants and servants of varying backgrounds and talents—each tasked with assisting the grand artist in his creative work. It was a strange, yet exciting time. The market outside was ever-raging, with trade auctions driving the economy into a chaotic dance. The locations of various trades were in constant flux, signs adorned with foreign scripts marking territories and signals of commerce.

Despite all the clamor, there was peace within the house. The noise of the world outside could never truly penetrate the sanctity of the place where music was the priority, the true function of the home. The walls were lined with instruments—string, woodwind, and brass—that waited eagerly for the call to action. The music that poured from them would take on a life of its own, filling the air, curling around the furniture, wrapping itself around the very souls of those who lived there.

Sweden and the West Coast of Europe had long been a source of inspiration for artists, and their beauty had worked its magic on Ludwig. It was a delightful treat to the eyes, and the very landscape seemed to breathe in time with the rhythm of his compositions. Here, on the fringes of civilization, in the quiet corners where the world seemed to slow down, great art would emerge.

The volume in the house often grew loud, stretching beyond the polished professionalism one might expect from a group of esteemed musicians. But that was the point. To achieve the best sound, one had to push the boundaries—sometimes the notes would clash, the strings would snap, and the woodwinds would screech—but in those moments of dissonance, magic would often appear. It was in the chaos that true art was forged.

Outside the house, the world was in constant motion. The Gutenberg press had revolutionized the way information spread, and with it, the objectives of humanity seemed clearer than ever: to fill the voids, to consume knowledge, to give the people something to hold onto. The press was now a staple of the human experience, its mechanical hum not unlike the rhythms of the house itself.

In this new colony, names were given to its residents with care, reflecting not only their roles but the connection to something greater. They were seen as the servants of the United Kingdom and Europe—creators, workers, thinkers. Many had come from distant lands, their identities rooted in the plants and natural joys of their homelands. It was a place where cultural fusion was not only accepted but encouraged.

Schooling was no longer confined to daylight hours. The pursuit of knowledge had become an all-consuming passion, stretching into the late hours of the night, when the world outside was quiet and the only sound was the rustling of pages and the scratching of quills. The schools, though demanding, had an undeniable energy. They pushed students beyond their limits, expecting them to create with the precision of a finely tuned instrument.

I was one of the many students who fell into this rhythm, though my name—Aloe Vera—was hardly a typical one. I had chosen it for its natural association with healing and resilience. It suited my role in the White administration, where I

worked diligently in the next jurisdiction to ensure that progress and organization took precedence. I found solace in the structure of it all, in the meticulous order that society demanded.

But even in the structured world of administration, I could not escape the pull of music. The hum of creativity was inescapable. That's why, away from the demands of my work, I often took quarters with Ludwig van Beethoven himself. It was a strange arrangement, but one that suited us both. The great composer's genius demanded an environment that could sustain it, and I—though no musician of note—provided the assistance he required. I often felt more a servant than an artist, but the music was the reward. The notes, the harmonies, the cadences—all of them filled me in ways I had never imagined possible.

Each day was marked by a ringing, a constant sound that permeated the air. The house was never quiet, even in the late hours. Beethoven, though aging, had a fervor that could not be stilled. His compositions poured forth as if from a never-ending fountain, and the small helpers and I were there to carry out his wishes. We played the instruments he demanded, adjusted the scores, and analyzed every note as if it were a small piece of the grand puzzle. It was exhausting work, but the results were worth every minute of effort.

Neighbors sometimes grew angry with the noise, though. Our loud discussions, debates on technique, and incessant tea drinking grated on their nerves. They could not understand the dedication behind it all—the genius that required hours of constant tinkering, of experimentation. To them, it must have seemed absurd: a White man, a midget, and a colored person making music together. It was a sight to behold, but one that could only be understood by those who had the patience to look beyond the surface.

Tea, however, was a universal constant. The musician himself had little love for coffee, preferring instead the delicate warmth of tea as he contemplated the next great symphony. It was a ritual, one that soothed the mind and prepared it for the battles of composition. Tea drinking was an art in itself, an experience that required the utmost attention to detail. The leaves, the temperature of the water, the steeping time—every factor played a role in achieving the perfect cup.

But all of this—every note, every tea break, every debate on artistic merit—had one singular purpose: to produce the best possible music. It was the lifeblood of our existence. And in this pursuit, money played its part as well. As the world outside spun in its endless cycle of trade and commerce, we too were part of that system. The services we provided were valuable, and there were always financial pressures that hung over us. But it was the music that kept us going, the promise that if we could just perfect that elusive sound, everything else would fall into place.

The social battles we faced, too, were a significant influence on the music we created. The questions of identity, of belonging, of understanding our place in the world—these were the undertones that shaped the pieces Ludwig wrote. They were subtle, almost imperceptible, but they were there. And as we played the final chords, we understood that the music was not just for the ears. It was a reflection of the world itself, full of conflict, beauty, and the constant striving for something greater.

It was exciting, those days. Some of the best times I'd ever known. And as I sit here now, reflecting on those moments, I can't help but smile. The music was the constant—sometimes discordant, sometimes harmonious—but always alive. And I can't wait for the next challenge, for the next composition that will test our limits, our patience, and our creativity.

A Youth of Fire and Soil

By Jonathan Olvera

In my youth, the competitions of natural sports and charm pageants were not always as fulfilling as the time I spent reading—closely observing the natural patterns of communication and interpretation.

The prizes of my time were the same: furs and squirrels. Nothing shiny. Nothing made in factories. Just what we could gather, craft, and share.

I cherished the bold medical experiments made possible through young medical students with the right utensils, who worked to make even the most common day a worthwhile effort. Their hands, nervous but eager, held scalpels and solutions as if each one could make a miracle happen.

Staying at home and reading the Bible, I made a fertile grasp at understanding what the market and university studies meant—what they offered in the order of programs and socialism, all in the name of keeping any useful information. Some of it made sense to me. Some of it drifted above my head like clouds too high to touch. But I kept reading. I kept trying.

The natural world, to me, was a delightful playground—especially when I chose to obey the directives given by our pastors and teachers. I found God's voice not just in scripture, but in the chirp of crickets, the rhythm of rainfall, and the fierce stillness of the mountains.

Common quarters were the rule. Sharing space meant sharing stories, too—of hardship, of survival, of gratitude. Planning for resource availability and modification was a natural pastime. There was no waste, and every drop of water had purpose.

Colors were a frustrating puzzle. I was never ashamed of the color of my own skin, although the plight of public shame and humiliation felt like a disease. It was not contagious by breath, but by ignorance. Even as a child, I could feel its weight in the room, even if no words were spoken.

Still, I knew in myself that the fate of one to another was to die from old age. Still, it became difficult to interpret the intentions of others, given their productivity and use of mathematics. People treated success like it was a formula: the right clothes, the right grades, the right voice. But I knew life wasn't math. It was music. It was a mystery.

Faith was always there. Logic sometimes fails.

Yet I felt enlightened—familiar with the Word—knowing by observation the truth of life. My eyes became my teachers. My hands, my proof.

Life was more complicated than I could interpret or understand, but that never stopped me from trying.

The angels and trees whispered a new message every day. They danced a song in the flames of the sun and under the moon. I would often sit alone near the mesquite trees and listen. The branches swayed like dancers, and sometimes I imagined they were telling stories from faraway lands.

There was always the need to satisfy the local hunger for a steel trade. The horrid nature of collecting that resource—the blackened hands, the broken backs—left scars on the body and mind. But it fed families. It paved roads. It gave children shoes.

I grew stronger in character. I needed to work and become an honest, hardworking individual. Each season taught me something new about effort, about patience, about the beauty of seeing something grow—whether it was a crop or a person.

There was nothing that was going to stop me or get in my way. Not then, and not now.

The passages of this life are many, and the demands of the villages weigh heavily on the feet and hands that labor. But I never saw labor as punishment. I saw it as part of the dance—the slow rhythm of creation and contribution.

My youth was a delight, though I was not spared discomfort. I always needed to know more—more about food, agriculture, and the production of the precious resources that shaped our scenery and culture.

I remember planting seeds with my bare hands, feeling the warmth of the soil as the sun hit my back. Each sprout that broke through the ground reminded me that even the buried can rise again.

It was the norm for me to honor this passage, to respect tradition, and to make the best of bad situations using prayer and fasting. Hunger made the prayers feel more urgent. Fasting sharpened my focus. It was never about punishment—it was about clarity.

I learned to honor my parents and maintain never-ending respect for my neighbors. Their kindness was my inheritance. Their stories, my guideposts.

Sometimes, life gives us hunger and thirst. It takes more than it gives.

It challenges us to hunt, to work in unlikable places. But when a person listens—and has faith in the better—one step forward always leads to another.

I have seen broken things be mended. I have seen barren places bloom. I have seen people rise when the world gave them every reason to fall.

The wind still tells stories. The trees still sway in rhythm. The sun still scorches, and the moon still cools.

My life began with questions—but it continues in answers.

Answers found not in textbooks, but in toil. Not in fame, but in faith. Not in comfort, but in character.

And so I walk still—feet dusted from the desert, eyes lifted to the sky, hands ready to work, and heart ready to believe.

The Treasury of Fate: A Youth’s Chronicle of Vision and Valor

By Jonathan Olvera

In a time of national transformation, a young student immersed in the United States Treasury's academic and civic systems begins a journey shaped by duty, mentorship, and ambition. Under the guidance of powerful figures and visionaries like Andrew Jackson, he is called to participate in foundational efforts to shape economic policy and social reform. The student’s dedication grows alongside the dream of establishing a labor-based banking system, as he navigates the pressures of a changing society and the promise of international trade.

The times were changing.

I held on tightly to my trousers and to the colors that meant the most—symbols of values, of identity, of a nation in flux.

As a student within the sacred halls of the United States Treasury and our growing network of schools, I listened with unwavering focus to the voice of authority—the Master of the Population. He gave strict commands: we were to participate in local offices, to rise above passivity, and to take up the work of strategic calculation. It was more than arithmetic. It was the crafting of future policy, the shaping of a nation's heart.

Through efforts, policies, evolving laws, and social norms that passed like seasons, we were taught to observe, calculate, and act. We were soldiers of the intellect, molded for purpose.

Among us was my friend and mentor, Andrew Jackson—not the president from the history books, but a man equally fiery in spirit and belief. He grew anxious, impatient even, to gather all the brightest students and most tireless laborers. His

dream was vast. He poured his soul into the modern-day Treasury and worked tirelessly to launch a new bank built on labor contracts and the will of the working people.

I was young—barely a man—but I felt the flame in my chest ignite with every opportunity presented to us. There was pressure, of course. The weight of society, its judgments, and its growing expectations loomed overhead. But in our core, we were strong. We had a vision—an objective—etched into our hearts and minds.

We worked long hours—days rolled into months, and months into years. Our vision became action, and our action became impact. Slowly, the ripple reached beyond our shores. Trade discussions opened with Oriental powers and other East Asian nations. Interest began to swirl from unexpected corners. China, ever watchful and deliberate, inquired about our economic note and how it might be incorporated into the broader Asian economy.

The civilians back home were electrified. The idea that ordinary people, elected by their peers, could shape global trade and diplomacy—it was thrilling. It brought a sense of agency. It united the scholar, the laborer, and the dreamer under a shared purpose.

Then the call came. We were summoned to China. Not merely as envoys of trade, but as bearers of an idea—of a way of life. We packed what we could: handwoven goods, our finest forged instruments, powdered inks, and the emblems of our home. These were more than items. They were offerings of goodwill, of craftsmanship, of identity.

Yet not all was welcomed with open arms. Our ideas, however noble and honest in intention, began to attract criticism. Skepticism rippled across global waters. Some asked: Who are these people? What is their purpose? What right do they have to lead?

I was a very young man when all of this escalated into what history may one day call a trade war. Tariffs turned into threats. Diplomacy twisted into distrust. I found myself caught in the crossfire—not of bullets, but of ideals and ambitions.

Our Command and Staff, firm in their purpose, pressed forward. They took initiative, believing fully in the power of our schools and the education we had fostered. We taught where we could, explained when permitted, and shared our truths, though sometimes in whispers.

It was no longer simply a matter of currency or labor contracts. It became a matter of destiny. A turning point in fate, written not just in treaties or policy memos, but in the sweat of our brows and the ache in our backs.

The world watched as this young generation—our generation—rose to claim a role in shaping the future. We had no certainty of outcome, only belief. Belief in effort, in vision, in the power of a people united by purpose and unafraid to face adversity.

And so I tell this story now, not because I emerged unscathed, but because I survived with understanding.

I was there when the treasury became more than just a vault—it became a temple of human labor and vision. I stood with my comrades, young and old, as we crossed oceans not for conquest, but for cooperation. And I faced a world of doubt with the calm resolve of one who believes in tomorrow.

The times were changing. And we changed with them.

But in our hearts, the colors remained

As the student matures into a man, his ideals are tested by international tension and a growing trade conflict with China. Yet through struggle, education, and belief in collective purpose, he learns that the true strength of a nation lies in its people's vision and resilience. Despite global doubt and domestic challenges, he reflects on his journey with pride, recognizing that the foundation they built was not just economic—it was a legacy of hope, cooperation, and enduring identity.

The Last Quiet Heart

By Dorothy "Dot" Hartwell

In The Last Quiet Heart by Dorothy "Dot" Hartwell, an elderly woman grapples with the overwhelming noise, chaos, and loneliness of a modern world she no longer recognizes. As she clings to her faith amidst societal decay and personal loss, an unexpected encounter with a lost child rekindles her hope and reminds her that even in the darkest times, grace can find its way to an open heart.

“Oh, Goodness!”

Alone and awakened by the most disturbing noises I could imagine.

- Roaring vehicles.
- Racing criminals.
- Desert temperatures.

What else could go wrong today?! I asked myself.

Beginning to grow old and still dealing with the problem of having to live with a young crowd so accustomed to *bad endings*. Always a new drama, always a new danger. No respect for peace, quiet, or modest living. There was a time when you could leave your door unlocked and fall asleep to the sound of birds and wind in the trees. Now, it’s all sirens, screeching tires, and yelling at all hours of the night.

“Christ! I ought to call the law!” I exclaimed, sitting up with a jolt and knocking my Bible off the side table. But of course, I couldn’t. Not since I’d given up my landline. They said, *"It's all about emails and tablets now, dear."* Gave me a little screen, told me to press this and swipe that—and next thing I knew, the rotary phone I'd trusted since 1964 was gone.

The Lord knows, in all my years of prayer and keeping the common study, how terrible the sounds of this chaos were—ringing in my house like the Devil's orchestra. It caused me to feel uneasy in the deepest part of my spirit. Like something was coming. Something not good.

And how unfruitful the circumstance that I gave up my telephone in exchange for electronic communications. A glowing rectangle to tell me what I already knew: the world had gone mad.

Rude responses and feeble manners of the population to which madams of my age were not available to attend to such nonsense. It wasn’t just the noise or the gadgets—it was the feeling. The atmosphere. Heavy, pressing. Like an invisible hand was pushing down on all of us.

I was very much mindful of the new situation and quite verily certain there was some trickery involved when the telly started spouting its usual hysteria. I’d turned it on for some comfort, perhaps the morning news or a gospel song. But instead, it read:

Millions of individuals in tragedy! Infected by virus and disease!

My hand flew to my mouth. I hadn’t even put my slippers on. My hair was a mess, but that didn’t matter—not in a world where invisible sickness could take us all in a matter of days.

Uncertain of how to make the best of my soul available to fix anything wrong, I listened.
Frightened and ready for the worst.
Very religious and trusting the words of hard-working people. Not the television folk, but the ones you meet at the church potluck, or the kind nurse who held my hand when my Albert passed.

I began to read the Bible. The Psalms first, then Proverbs. I always found peace in the words of David. I whispered them like a lullaby, not to sleep—but to survive.

I decided to keep my faith and belief in the salvation of the commoner available. Even if I couldn’t make sense of the world, I could pray for it. That’s what we do when we’re old and wise and helpless. We pray.

Goodness! Who knows who those bandits were!
Stealing and causing mayhem!
Maybe someday someone will catch them.

I imagined the lot of them—hopped up on who knows what, speeding down the road like the Devil himself was behind them. No good youngsters and bandits! It seemed their riots would never end!

But I still had my faith and trust in God. That had never left me. Even when Albert went. Even when I couldn’t visit my sister in the nursing home because of “restrictions.” Even when my church closed its doors and went “online.” Imagine that! Church online! You try asking Jesus to bless a livestream.

I shuffled into the kitchen, wrapped in my faded robe, and put the kettle on. The air still crackled with noise from outside—yelling, music, maybe even gunshots. Or maybe my ears were playing tricks on me again. The doctor says they sometimes do that.

I stirred a spoon of honey into my tea, watching the steam rise up like incense. I thought of the younger days, when my children were small and we’d sit around the table saying grace before breakfast. I’d tell them, “No matter what goes on outside, God’s in here. In our home. In our hearts.”

I wish they’d come to visit more often. But they live in the city now. And they're busy. Always busy.

I took my tea to the front window. Carefully. Slowly. The desert sun was already bright, though it wasn't even eight o’clock. It shimmered on the pavement and turned the world gold. But even that couldn’t cover up the ugliness of what was happening outside.

A car sped past—too fast. Windows down, music blaring, laughter that didn’t sound happy. A motorcycle followed, swerving like it was dodging ghosts. I clutched my cross necklace and prayed.

This generation, Lord… guide them. Protect them. Turn their hearts from chaos to peace.

And then I saw her.

A little girl. No more than eight or nine. Sitting on the curb across the street, holding a stuffed rabbit. No shoes. No parents in sight.

“Oh, Goodness,” I whispered again, setting my cup down. I stepped outside. The heat hit me like a wall, but I kept going.

She looked up, eyes wide and scared. I asked her name, and she whispered it. “Sierra.”

“Are you alright, child?” I asked, kneeling beside her. She shook her head.

I didn’t press. I didn’t need to. I just opened my arms and let her lean in. Sometimes, that’s enough.

We sat there for a long time, the two of us—an old woman and a lost child—until the noise quieted down and the sun moved higher in the sky.

Maybe the world *had* gone mad. Maybe we were all just trying to survive in it, each in our own way. But in that moment, with a child’s small hand in mine, I remembered:

Even in the worst of times, God sends reminders of grace.

And sometimes, you just have to open the door.

The Last Quiet Heart ends not with grand resolutions, but with a simple, human truth: even in a broken world, kindness survives. Through the eyes of an aging woman and a lost child, Dorothy "Dot" Hartwell reminds us that sometimes the only answer to chaos is faith, tenderness, and the willingness to open the door.

“Maybe the world has gone mad. Maybe we were all just trying to survive in it, each in our own way.”

Living in Color

by Albie Verona

In the bright, pulsing heat of the American summer of 1960, I lived a quiet life. My name is Albie Verona. I took after my grandfather, a wiry man with silver hair and careful hands, who spent his afternoons adjusting the rooftop television antenna, searching for clearer signals from the chaos of the sky. He had a knack for positioning things just right—furniture, lamps, even people.

Reader’s Digest was always a part of our lives. We’d sit by the window when the power flickered out or when the reception fuzzed with static, passing pages back and forth as the day dimmed into evening. We read about faraway places, clever inventions, and families who lived neater, simpler lives. Sometimes, I wondered what it would be like to live in one of those tidy stories.

I was a light-skinned African American boy growing up in a place where color mattered more than I ever wanted it to. I always felt Black, though I’d often hear otherwise. The sun never made me burn—it just deepened me, warmed me, reminded me that my skin was history and sunlight combined.

When I turned twenty-one, things shifted. Not just because I could now legally drink or vote or rent a car—though those were all fine milestones—but because I started seeing my grandfather in a different way. The man who once carved toy animals from driftwood and played jazz records while frying catfish suddenly seemed older, wearier. The sparkle in his eyes had faded into something distant and mysterious.

That summer, we spent hours in the kitchen reimagining our favorite recipes—fried chicken with mango chutney, watermelon chilled in ginger-lime brine, collard greens with coconut milk. My grandfather said we were “cooking in color,” which meant bold flavors, wild combinations, and a refusal to apologize for joy.

But then, something strange happened.

One afternoon, I found Grandfather in the backyard, pacing. He was jumpy, whispering to himself, looking over his shoulder like the sky might break open and

accuse him of something. I followed his gaze and saw a man—Black, barefoot, and chained to a post like a scene pulled from the nightmares of history.

My breath caught.

“Grandfather,” I asked slowly, “what is this?”

He didn’t look at me at first. When he finally spoke, it was with a voice that sounded like it belonged to another century. “That’s a slave, Albie.”

I stared, unsure if he was serious, if this was some bizarre performance piece, a protest, or a test. “What do you mean, a slave?”

“That’s how we make food,” he said, eyes vacant. “That’s how we build things. You want progress, you need labor. He does the work.”

I didn’t know whether to run or scream or cry. But something made me stay. Not trust—God, no—but curiosity. Or maybe it was disbelief, so deep it needed confirmation.

“You want me to—what?” I asked.

“I want you to take him every paper in the house. He’ll finish your school essays, your taxes, your letters to the editor. Everything you’re behind on. That’s what he’s here for.”

I didn’t know what haunted me more: the man chained in the yard or the calm, resigned tone my grandfather used, like this was something passed down like old photos or recipes. I gathered the papers and gave them to the man, who looked at me with eyes like stars that had seen extinction.

He didn’t speak. He just nodded. His hands were cracked, but steady. He started writing.

I couldn’t take it. I went inside and lay on the couch, hoping this was a dream born from heatstroke and memory. Grandfather went out again and stood before the man. He began asking him questions—about where he came from, what he knew, how fast he could build a house or write a book or dig a trench.

That night, I didn’t sleep. I sat on the porch and stared at the sky, trying to find some kind of explanation in the stars. The crickets chirped. The air was thick. The past was louder than any radio station I could tune into.

The next day, Grandfather said we were taking the man “on the road.” Said he could paint murals, fix wiring, carry lumber, clean gutters—“a working man’s renaissance,” he called him.

We drove across the Midwest, through cornfields and cities, deserts and diners. Everywhere we stopped, people stared. Some gave knowing nods. Others looked horrified. But no one stopped us. No one asked why this man wore chains.

In Tulsa, we stopped by a mural wall and Grandfather handed the man a brush. “Paint the story of America,” he said.

The man dipped the brush in every color. He painted bodies dancing and burning, cities rising and crumbling, music notes tangled in cotton stems, fists raised, tears falling. He painted a blue sky that cracked open to reveal a heart beating underneath.

When he was done, he dropped the brush and looked at me.

“Sometimes,” he whispered, “being colored is more than a skin tone. It’s a weight. It’s a song. It’s a memory nobody asked to remember.”

We left the chains there, hanging on a nail beside the mural. Grandfather said nothing. Maybe he finally understood. Maybe he never would.

But I did.

I understood that living in color meant seeing everything—past and present, pain and joy. It meant knowing that America was a canvas still being painted, messy and magnificent. And it meant confronting the wild parts of yourself that history tried to bury.

I took the man’s hand, and together we walked toward a future not yet written—each step an act of defiance, each breath a stroke of color across a still unfinished page.

Curtains in the Wind

by Jonathan Olvera

This heartfelt story captures the quiet resilience of youth in a time when hard work and humble beginnings shaped a young man's dreams. Set against the backdrop of a new frontier, it reflects the tender longing of a young colored boy whose admiration for a Nephite girl blooms gently, yet bravely, within the unspoken barriers of race and circumstance. Their connection, though subtle, speaks volumes about hope, dignity, and the timeless ache of first love.

I was a young man in the 'new' territory—part hopeful, part desperate, but entirely eager to shape a path that fit the dreams I carried like stones in my pockets. The days were long, and I relished them. There was something noble in toil, in watching the sun arc across a sky too big to be owned, in feeling the sweat bead and drip from the brow while working toward something, even if it was just a clean path or a clearer patch of dirt.

The grass in the flats never grew too high, but its seed scattered wide and wild. One of my chores was to keep it from taking over, pulling roots from cracks, making room for order. In my spare hours, I turned to gardening, using old tools passed down or found left behind. With time, I saved enough for a pair of trousers—real sturdy ones with an overall loop that made me feel like I belonged somewhere. A spare shirt was never far, if I asked around kindly. I found ways to make shoes from scraps, and suddenly, I was moving stones and cleaning yards for pay.

“Fantastico!” I said to myself one morning, holding a little cash in hand. A few more weeks, and I could afford boots—the kind that clack on wood and grip the earth with confidence. I dreamed of putting them on with those trousers, shaving my head clean with a new razor, and striding into the month with purpose.

I lived in the yard of a relative, an Englishman, stern and busy. In a clearing behind his property, I’d put up four wooden posts and hung a curtain. That little space was mine. A cot lay hidden from the view of the main house by a picket fence, and there was always a bucket of water and a bar of soap nearby. I had two wash rags and a routine: wake early, wash up, dress with care, and work wherever I could.

Every week, I gave my friend some money for the stay. It wasn’t much, but it mattered to me. I wanted to live with dignity.

Evenings were my joy. The warm breeze kissed my skin just before dusk. I’d sit quietly, gazing at the stars peeking through purple clouds, and listen to the soft rustle of dry grass. The air smelled of earth and wind, sometimes of bread baking in a far-off home.

Then came the visitors.

They were men looking to buy property—flats to build homes and dreams of their own. With them came young women in woven sun dresses, their voices light, laughter like birdsong. They moved across the fields with grace and carried themselves like flowers swaying to invisible music.

I watched them from the corner of my fence, hidden in shadow, heart thudding like a drum. I had never seen such beauty up close. One night, I lay on my cot and stared at the curtain swaying gently, thinking of their voices, their smiles. I longed to be more than a worker, more than a boy behind a curtain. I longed to be seen.

On my morning walks to the business up the dirt path, I began to greet them—these sunlit people. A tip of the hat, a polite smile. In time, they smiled back. One

of them, a girl, began to speak with me. She was Nephite, as she described herself, with fair skin that shimmered like soft moonlight. Her eyes were curious, her laugh sincere.

“I’d be glad to introduce you to some of my friends,” she said once, brushing a strand of hair from her cheek.

I froze. No one had offered that before.

She knew I was colored. I knew her friends might not approve. But something in the way she looked at me—steady and kind—made me believe. She didn’t look through me. She saw me.

We kept talking, sometimes near the edge of the fields, sometimes by the old stone wall on the road to the business. She told me about the city, about books and songs I had never heard. I told her about my work, my plans, my dream to one day own a small plot of land.

I wanted to invite her to my place, behind the curtain, past the picket fence. I wanted to show her that I kept myself clean, that I worked hard, that I had dreams like any man. But I was afraid. Not of her—but of the world that might judge her for choosing me.

That night, I washed my hands twice. I brushed my cot clean. I lit a candle I had been saving and set it on the ledge by my bed. The curtain rustled as the wind passed through, like a breath waiting to be spoken.

I wondered if she would come.

I wondered if the world would ever be soft enough for people like us—two souls meeting across invisible fences.

She never said yes or no. But the next day, she pressed a small note into my palm. It was a page from a book, a poem about love being brave.

I still have it.

Sometimes, I stand in the clearing where my cot used to be, long since taken down. The posts are gone. But I remember the breeze, the grass, the way my heart leapt when I saw her dress catch in the wind.

And I remember that curtain, waving like hope.

Summer of the New Empire

By Jonathan Olvera

Beneath golden suns and stitched silver dreams,
new crowns were woven, old blood was redeemed.
In the fields of the wild, a future took flight—
hope, stitched in silence, against the coming night.

The scenery was splendid. It was early summer in the prairies of the Hungarian wilderness. The grass was short, and the green vegetation had not grown too tall, as the laborers under the House of Moors had just finished trimming the fields.

It was the year 1300, and the populace had shifted drastically from the segregated societies of the twelfth century.

The Spanish and Roman civilizations were now enjoying the fruits of a new treaty, negotiated and enforced by the emerging courts of the land. Laws were drafted, debates were held in open air gatherings, and an unusual energy stirred the once-fragmented territories.

"Etruscan" was the new word used to describe the blending of cultures—the proud, artistic traditions of old Tuscany merged with the strength of Viking and Roman legacies.

Farther east, hidden among the misty hills of Transylvania, a secret lingered.

Unknown to most, advanced technologies had been preserved—healing methods and elixirs capable of making the pale northern peoples healthier and more energetic than either the Spanish Romans or the New Viking Etruscans. These were remnants of Nephite knowledge, guarded closely by an ancient few.

"Plenty of gold," remarked a young man as he surveyed a chest brimming with coins.

"The courts must have a difficult time interpreting this new culture," said another, his tone light but thoughtful.

Meanwhile, votes were being cast and agreements signed, ensuring the foundation of a new empire under the leadership of Vlad Dracula. Inclusion was key to stability. Even the "coloreds," as the foreigners and darker-skinned populations were called, were welcomed—not merely for goodwill, but also for the health benefits their presence brought to the community, a curious belief held among the council.

The ground around the marketplace had been cleared of distracting debris, smoothed over so that noblemen and merchants alike could move freely. Stalls of

woven silks and intricate strings sprang up like wildflowers, the vibrant colors drawing travelers from distant lands.

Although the northern territories bore similar populations, their markets thrived on different needs. They required not only goods but also blood—fresh blood for their governors and politicians, whose strange customs were whispered about even in the southern courts.

"I am sure glad we will have company," said Vlad the Second, a young man with sharp eyes and a ready smile.

"How glad will you be?" teased an Etruscan guard. "You are fit to be a good ruler."

"I hear you," Vlad replied thoughtfully. "And I will pay close attention. Meanwhile, I must find honest work to earn my keep."

As he spoke, a clear voice rang out from a nearby stall.
"Come here, young man!" hollered a Nephite girl, her hair bound with silver string. "If you want work, I can sew you some clothes to sell on the market!"

"Excellent! Awesome! Thank you!" Vlad said eagerly.

The Nephite girl wasted no time. She pulled out her measuring tape and set about calculating the thickness of fabrics, sketching quick patterns on scraps of parchment.

"A king's fit is the best item to sell on the trade route," she said, her hands quick and sure.
"I hope to make this outfit so fine that one day, someone might mistake you for a king."

"Sometimes I think people are joking when they say I could be a good leader," Vlad admitted, watching her work.

"Don't ever think someone is lying to you when they give a proper compliment," she said firmly. "It’s rude to doubt kindness."

"The idea just makes me feel tense," Vlad confessed. He sat down beside her as she pulled a stool close and unpacked her workbag, marking notations, snipping thread, and preparing to weave together a royal-looking tunic.

"I don't fear battles or wars," Vlad said after a pause. "But I don't know how the people would react if I ended the life of an opposition. I would definitely bleed them. I could even... eat them."

The girl paused, meeting his eyes without fear.
"Keep thinking about it," she said calmly. "A leader must know what he is capable of—and what he refuses to become."

The evening sun melted over the hills, casting everything in a golden glow. Merchants packed up their goods, families lit fires, and the music of distant lutes floated through the air.

Vlad thought hard. The temptation of blood, power, and fear was strong. But somewhere deep inside, another force stirred—a vision of a kingdom built not only on strength but on ingenuity and understanding.

"Tell me, young ruler," the Nephite girl said as she stitched the last silver thread into his tunic, "what do you want your name to be remembered for?"

Vlad looked at the fine garment, gleaming like a knight’s armor in the firelight.
"For hope," he said finally.
"And for change."

She smiled as she handed him the finished tunic. "Then wear this proudly, Vlad Dracula. For the empire needs you more than it knows."

And so, on that splendid summer day in the Hungarian wilderness, the seeds of a new legend were planted—seeds that would one day grow into the myths and fears of generations yet to come.

And as the stars pricked the violet sky,
the boy who would be king stood silent,
his heart stitched with questions,
his soul cloaked in unseen fire.
In the hush of that first summer,
the New Empire was not merely born—
it dreamed.

Desolation Walk: A Journey of Survival and Hope

by Jonathan Olvera

I wake up in the morning, drowsy. The bright sun fills the room. I need water. I feel the heat on my forehead, enduring the pounding headache. The bills are due. I get up and make my way to the bathroom. I wash my face with a green bar of soap and look in the mirror. "Good morning!" I say to myself. "It’s so hot! Oh, it's exhausting!"
I step out of the small bathroom in my sheet-metal trailer home, dizzy and a bit afraid. I take two steps into my room and grab a towel, fresh underwear, and clothes for the day. After undressing, I turn on the shower, thinking about women and my need to impress an employer. I shower, feeling a small pleasure in completing the task. I continue to get ready, preparing my boots—it’s a new day out in our territory. I speak aloud, "Oh goodness, another day."

In Arizona, the scene is always busy with the efforts of migrants, laborers, and other workers eager to continue the work of those before them. My door leading outside is simple, with a knob and a lock. I keep a key on a lanyard. I’m grateful to have shelter, running water, and a small electricity allowance. I unlock the door, turn the knob, and pull it open. The sun shines as I step outside, down from the platform and onto the old, hard-packed dirt. Memories flood back—clearings, formations, roads, trade paths. I look around and focus on my objectives for the day, searching for a way to earn a dollar.

I walk forward to the end of the park and step onto the geometric concrete path. After a few minutes, excitement builds up in me. "Any new tasks?" I ask myself aloud. "What’s there to do today?" I always make sure I’m not talking to an audience. Moving westward, I come to an intersection with flags of victories and riches decorating the paths before me. I feel like a pawn on a chessboard. I take a

right turn, moving northward. The burning sun is high in the sky, the air thinner than usual, drying my throat. Realizing I forgot water, I ran back to my trailer, up the stairs, and unlocked the door. Hurriedly, I grab my backpack, fill it with three water bottles, and step outside again, locking up. Ready for a new day, I think, This is a battle. In our time.

Careful not to trip on rocks, wood, or concrete, I hurry back to my original spot. "This is desolation!" I think, imagining King Mosiah's exile. The new steel structures around me are always changing. To my left is a bus stop. Down the central road over the Salt River is a passenger train. I check my pocket for leftover coins from previous jobs. "What does the moon bring to the table?" I wonder. I must work, to be prepared. I decide to sit on the steel structure, waiting thirty minutes for the propane community bus. Looking left, right, and up at the sky, I’m grateful.

Soon, I spot the mechanics, carbon, and sheet metal rolling by. Could this be a problem for us? I think. The visible efforts to keep going. I say to myself, "This is commonplace." I feel intimidated, but I must continue. Closing my eyes, then opening them, I see the bus arriving. I step on and make my way to the front. "Good day!" I say to the driver.

"Pay the fare," he replies. I reach into my pocket, pull out the fare, and insert it into the machine. "Thank you!" I say.

"No worries," he responds.

I look around at the faces on the bus, some I recognize from the local area. Finding a seat, I settled in, only riding down the street and over the bridge to catch the train to the downtown sector. As we move, I glance out the window briefly, preferring instead to look at my fingernails. After a few minutes, I reach my stop and pull the cord. I thank the driver aloud, stepping off the platform and onto the concrete landing. The sun is still high, and the train station lies ahead across the landing. I look left, then right, making sure it’s safe before crossing.

Once across, I sit in my usual spot to wait. The train will arrive in about fifteen minutes, heading east or northwest. As I sit, I think, Oh, I’m going to need water. This is nice. I enjoy daydreaming about rocks, metal, sand, and debris. Center Square—one of many clearings in the area—is a desolate landscape, surrounded by tall buildings, hotels, and timeshare rentals, marking the perimeter of this made city. I close my eyes and drift off, thinking not to observe too much.

The train bell rings in the distance, and I open my eyes, now sure the train is close. It pulls forward and stops. I board for an eastward ride. The morning sun bakes

down as I search for food. You eat meat, I think. It’s a good source of protein. Could that be a problem for us?

I step off the train at the platform, standing in my boots and green pants, which set me apart from the brown commonly worn to deter thieves or prospectors. I turn and see my objective: the local airport where I hope to find an employer. What else is there to do? I think. Exactly what I got up for.

"Church is for children. The temple is for men," I mutter, climbing the new electric staircase. At the top, I enter through a modern steel structure, hoping it will look even nicer in the future. Walking past the ticket kiosk inside, I observe. It’s all geometric. I think, “I’m looking for work.” Inside, a passage leads to a chamber with a lobby where people wait for the sky train. "That’s a good service!" I say aloud. Through an open window, I can see the constant clamor, the depletion of gold and silver, the barricades, the clock, and the friction of politics. It’s awful, I think, as a headache pulses. I don’t feel it’s right to participate. Still, I wait for the new addition to the station, the sky train and other features still under Construction.

As the sky train looms closer, I can hear the faint hum of its engines, the sound like a far-off dream that I’m not sure I can reach. The air, thick with heat and the scent of metal, presses down on me like a weight I can’t shake. The station buzzes around me, people coming and going, each absorbed in their own existence, each lost in the rhythm of survival. I glance down at my boots, scuffed and worn, a reminder of the roads I’ve walked, the paths I’ve taken, all leading me here.

I take a deep breath and let it out slowly, feeling the sun on my face and the steady beat of my heart. There is so much that could be, so much that is yet to come. The construction around me is a testament to ambition, to progress, but also to the endless cycle of struggle. The city is a puzzle, a collection of pieces that never quite fit together, and I am just one small part of it.

But as the sky train approaches, its silhouette sharp against the sky, I realize something. This is not the end of the road. Not yet. There are still days to walk, people to meet, battles to fight. The desolation is a part of me, but it does not define me. It never will.

I turn away from the station, heading back to the familiar streets I know, the worn path that has carried me through so many years. The sun is lower now, the heat is starting to fade, and I feel a glimmer of something—hope, perhaps, or simply the will to keep going.

Tomorrow will be another day, another step. Maybe it will be different. Maybe not. But I will keep moving, one foot in front of the other, toward whatever comes next.

The desert is vast, and its emptiness stretches out before me, but within it, there is life. There is always life.

Elantra the Hero: A Bark that Saved a Life

by Guadalupe

“Bark! Bark! Bark!”
“Yip! Yip!”

Elantra, my loyal little dog, wouldn’t stop barking. All day long at the trailer park, her ears perked up and her paws skittered across the tile floor as she dashed toward the window. Her sharp barks pierced through the air like warning sirens.

“Quiet, girl!” I called out, trying to finish cleaning the small kitchen space in my trailer. But Elantra wouldn’t settle. Her attention was fixed on our neighbor, a man I barely knew, who lived just a few trailers down. Every time he made a move—closing his door, taking out the trash, even walking to his car—Elantra would growl or bark fiercely.

It wasn’t just noise. It was something deeper.

I’d always trusted Elantra. She wasn’t the kind of dog to bark for no reason. I found her two years ago at a local swap meet—she was timid then, with kind eyes and a tail that wagged nervously. But once she came home with me, her personality bloomed. She was obedient, affectionate, and strangely intuitive. When I was down, she curled beside me. When strangers approached too closely, she was alert.

That’s why her constant barking worried me.

“Mom,” I told her over the phone, “I think the dog’s psychic. She knows something’s off with that guy.”

My mom just laughed, but I wasn’t joking. Something felt wrong. Elantra could sense it.

Then, on a quiet Tuesday afternoon, two police cars rolled into the park. Flashing red and blue lights bounced off the trailer windows as officers began walking from trailer to trailer. Eventually, they reached mine.

“Ma’am, have you noticed anything strange about your neighbor?” an officer asked.

I told them about Elantra—how she’d been barking for days, always when he was near. I explained her usual behavior, how this wasn’t normal for her.

The officers nodded, jotting down notes. They moved on. Within the hour, they were knocking on the neighbor’s door.

What happened next was like something out of a crime show.

The man was arrested—right there in the trailer park. Handcuffed, silent, and led away. I watched from my window, heart pounding. The officers later told me he was wanted for questioning in a nearby city… for murder. Turns out, he had fled and was hiding in our park under a false name.

“Awesome!” I exclaimed, though part of me was still in shock. Elantra had known. She’d sensed something I never could have.

Thanks to my little dog, a murderer had been found. A life—or many—might have been saved. I hugged Elantra that night, tears in my eyes and gratitude in my heart.

She just wagged her tail like it was nothing.

But to me?
It was everything.
What a smart, brave animal.

Foundations in the Wilderness

By Jonathan Olvera

"At last!" cried the doctor.

His name was Dr. Luphergenneze, though in truth, he was born Poslik, a man of humble origins and uncommon determination. He had abandoned the comforts and expectations of his old village to seek a new beginning in an uncharted land—a place whispered of in stories, where mind and body could be tested to their limits.

The land was raw and untamed, yet strangely inviting. Grasslands bowed in the wind, giving way to a wild expanse of earth and stone. Beyond them, the soft green sands shimmered under the sun like a vast, woven tapestry. It was here that Poslik saw his future. In the distance, jagged mountains pierced the sky, growing out of the horizon like sentinels watching over his dreams.

"This is the place," he whispered.

He had traveled on foot for days, his only companions the wind and the whisper of ancient soil. Now, at the edge of the wilderness, Dr. Luphergenneze—the name he adopted for his scholarly endeavors—began to plan.

The terrain offered both challenge and opportunity. He observed every detail with care. The flat land needed to be strong enough for a foundation, close to natural resources: timber, mud, stone, and water. There had to be potential for cultivation —food, straw, or grain. Without these, no settlement would last.

He took notes. He drew diagrams in the dirt. He paused often, absorbing the lay of the land, its rhythms and patterns.

"A home is more than walls," he muttered. "It is a harmony of structure and spirit."

Dr. Luphergenneze had studied architecture in his youth, but it was the kind that emerged from labor, not books. He believed building should begin with listening— to the land, the seasons, and the soul.

He was not unaware of the toll this journey had taken. His hands were blistered, his feet sore, his mind weary. Still, the thought of abandoning this quest never entered his mind.

"I need to rest," he said aloud, sitting on a boulder as the wind picked up.

“I have much work to do. There must be a better way to manage all this labor.”

Unbeknownst to Poslik, he was not entirely alone. Word of his journey had spread through nearby markets, passed from mouth to mouth like folklore in the making.

Some dismissed it as madness. Others, however, saw something different: courage, vision, and perhaps even wisdom.

As the sun cast long shadows, a young man approached from the west, where the land market lay buzzing with travelers and traders.

“Hello, sir!” the young man called out. “How are you?”

Startled, Poslik turned. The young man was sturdy, with curious eyes and a calm voice.

“I’m doing fine,” Poslik replied. “And you, young man?”

“I was walking through the area and noticed your work,” the stranger said. “It’s quite impressive.”

“Impressive?” Poslik raised an eyebrow. “It’s far from complete.”

“Yes,” said the young man. “But I study these things. I read. I want to learn more. My name is Justianus.”

“Well, Justianus,” Poslik said, “I am busy. But if you return another time, I may have a labor task worth your education.”

Justianus nodded respectfully. “Thank you, sir. I’ll come back. I want to see what this becomes.”

As the boy departed, Poslik felt a quiet warmth in his chest. Not because of the flattery, but because the work—his work—had drawn someone in. Perhaps this dream was not his alone.

The sky darkened. Night arrived with a hush, laying its velvet cloak across the pasture. Above, the moon bathed the land in silver.

“How wonderful is the night sky,” Poslik said to himself, “so clear, so full of questions.”

He lay on the earth and watched the stars. In the stillness, a different kind of thought came—one deeper than logic or design.

“The sun will rise,” he whispered. “And the choices will be mine.”

He closed his eyes. A breeze stirred the grasses. The land spoke not in words, but in rhythm.

In that moment, Poslik no longer felt alone. There was something larger than him at work—something guiding him, something sacred. The burden was still his, but now it felt shared. Not by men, but by meaning.

He thought of the ancient stories his grandmother told by firelight—of builders who pleased the heavens not by what they constructed, but by how they endured.

“I must be wise,” he said into the dark. “And I must be worthy.”

With morning came a new energy. Poslik gathered stones into piles. He marked the four corners of his imagined home. He dug a trench for water, chopped branches, and stripped bark. His hands bled. His back ached. But he smiled.

Later that day, Justianus returned, this time with two others: a carpenter and a farmer. They came not to spectate but to help.

“We heard about your vision,” said the farmer. “And we’d like to be part of it.”

And so they worked—together. The labor was still immense, but no longer impossible.

Dr. Luphergenneze—the thinker, the builder, the wanderer—had not only begun a house in the wilderness.

He had begun a community.

And in doing so, he laid a foundation deeper than stone.

And so, we come to the end of this collection—a woven tapestry of stories, snapshots of life and imagination, grounded in truth, elevated by wonder.

From the innocence of **Valentine’s Day** to the transformation within **The Price of Growth**, from the cosmic colors of **Heaven’s Treasure Box** to the laughter echoing through **Zippy Zany’s Clown Catastrophe**, these stories have carried us across worlds both real and imagined. We’ve danced under **The Great Galactic Streak**, whispered secrets in **A Place Held Near**, and found unexpected wisdom in **Bubbles: The Chimp Who Changed My Perspective**.

We met angels hidden in plain sight, wrestled with belief in **I Hate Reading the Bible (Until I Didn't)**, and found ourselves transformed by faith, family, and fire in tales like **Rudolph’s Journey**, **Santa’s Promise**, and **The Spirit of Saint Nicholas in the Southwest**.

We laughed, we questioned, we marveled.

In **Whispers of Lycea**, we followed a feline on a noble mission. In **Lost in Translation, Found in Japan**, we discovered clarity in confusion. Through **Collateral Regret**, **The Well of Change**, and **The Divide**, we wrestled with choices, both ours and history’s.

Every piece in this collection—from **Funny Story** to **The Talking Red Bird**, from **The Cow and the Cucumber** to **The Accidental Prophet**—is a fragment of a larger mosaic. They remind us that even the seemingly small or strange moments carry within them a deeper truth, a hidden gem, or a spark of divinity.

If you laughed, pondered, cried, or simply paused—then these stories have done their work. Like the **Thirteen Stars and the Miracle of Fire**, or **Guidance from the Heavens**, they were meant to shine for just a moment, lighting the path ahead in subtle ways.

So as we turn the final page, may you carry forward a little piece of magic, a newfound habit of wonder, and the simple, steady belief that stories—your stories—matter too.

With gratitude,
Jonathan Olvera

About the Author

Jonathan Olvera is a passionate writer and storyteller based in Phoenix, Arizona. With a background in Literature and Journalism, he has always been drawn to the power of words and their ability to connect people across cultures and experiences.

Jonathan's work often explores themes of national identity, resilience, and love, reflecting a deep understanding of the human condition. Whether through fictional worlds or poetic realism, his stories offer a window into how we endure, evolve, and hold onto hope.

When he's not writing, Jonathan enjoys exploring the desert landscapes that inspire his work, listening to world music, and reflecting on how the past and present shape who we become.